

NO COMET LEFT INSIDE

Total solar eclipse draws thousands of Comets, spectators across the U.S. to admire once-in-a-lifetime celestial wonder

ANDRÉ AVERION
Mercury Staff

Comets on campus found themselves in the direct path of a total solar eclipse on April 8 — This sighting brought thousands of spectators and experts to DFW for a phenomenon that will not return to the city until 2345.

During the morning of the celestial phenomenon, The Eclipse Planning Committee, led by UTD department head of science/mathematics education Mary Urquhart and UTD research scientist of Space Sciences Marc Haiston, held the “No Comets Left Inside” program across campus. With the help of The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the UTD Office of Research and Innovation, this program provided free merchandise, viewing glasses, telescope viewings, local music from Radio UTD and a discussion panel for the total solar eclipse. The panel included renowned UTD professor of physics and cosmologist Mustapha Ishak-Boushaki as well as Eileen Stansbery, NASA Division Chief of the Astro-materials Research and Exploration Science Division.

PHOTOS: SURJADITYA SARKAR AND SHREYA RAVI | MERCURY STAFF

Comets gathered all across campus to view the April 8 total eclipse, an event which had not occurred in North Texas since 1878 and will not occur again in North Texas until 2345.

“Today, scientists use solar eclipses to study the sun’s outer atmosphere and [solar] corona, and we can understand a variety of things about the formation and evolution of our solar system,” Stansbery said.

For 3 minutes and 52 seconds, DFW experienced a total eclipse as the moon passed between the sun and the Earth; only the solar corona was visible, the outermost layer of the sun consisting entirely of plasma. The moon’s 167 mile wide shadow carved a path of totality that raced across North Texas at 1600 mph. At 1:41 p.m. the eclipse brought the darkness of nightfall to daytime, silencing wildlife, dropping temperatures by 2 degrees Fahrenheit and making the planet Venus visible.

Discussion for a campus event began after the partial solar eclipse in 2017, but a full planning committee wasn’t assembled until 2022, according to committee member Pamela Gossin, professor of literature and of the history of science. In December 2022 the Eclipse Planning Committee presented their plans

for a campus event to the American Geophysical Union, which included helping to prepare local K-12 schools and teachers for the eclipse.

“We know that without a football stadium or without a large amount of extra parking, we couldn’t accommodate a large crowd from the general community coming to UT Dallas,” Urquhart said. “Instead, we tried to provide as much information as we could to help people in the broader DFW community area enjoy the eclipse where they were. School and teacher training was always a big part of our plan.”

The university welcomed several thousand according to UTD PD, including students, staff, local residents and travelers from across the nation; campus also hosted students from universities in Colorado, Michigan, Nevada and Utah. In a recent report, UTD said that the Dallas area would bring in a predicted more than \$492,000,000 in solar-eclipse expenditures alone. On-lookers came together at the Chess Plaza, Plinth, campus roundabout, Sciences Pavilion and the Callier Center for telescope viewing of the eclipse.


Physics alumnus David

the scientific community here,” Rodgers said.

Among the scientific community, associate professor of physics Fabiano Rodrigues and his student research team deployed signal sensors on the ground across campus with support from the Eclipse Planning Committee, which monitored interactions between the upper atmosphere and the eclipse during the event.

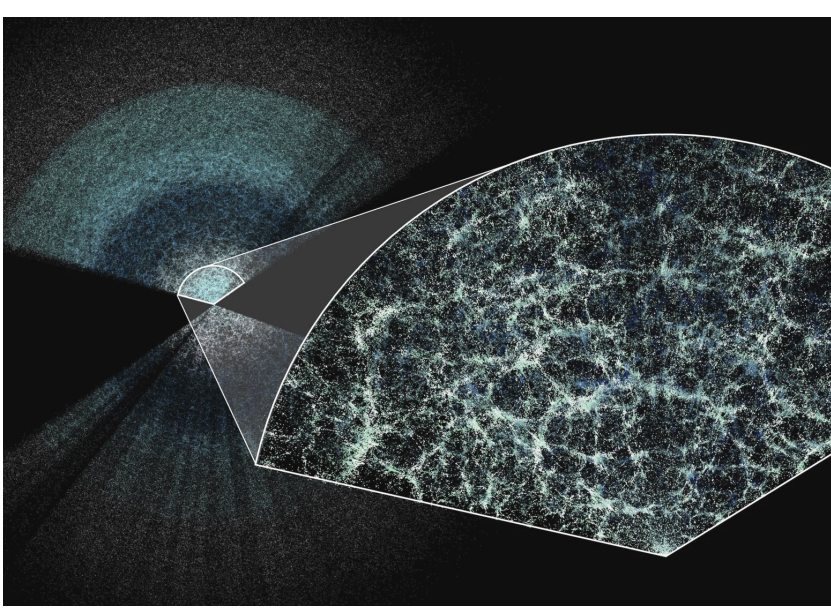
To ensure all students and faculty could view the total eclipse at 1:41 p.m., all classes and non-essential jobs were closed on campus between 1 p.m. and 2 p.m.

“I hope that our whole Comet community was able to experience this profound celestial event,” Urquhart said. “This was an incredible experience to really bring us all together as a Comet community, because wherever people were, we were all experiencing it at the same time.”



A Comet's map of the stars

UTD's Mustapha Ishak-Boushaki presents most precise map of the universe



COURTESY | UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND AUSTRALIA

Astrophysics professor Mustapha Ishak-Boushaki and his team presented the largest 3D map of the universe.

ANDRÉ AVERION
Mercury Staff

UTD Professor of Physics and Astrophysics Mustapha Ishak-Boushaki presented the largest 3D map of the universe and his research team’s findings from the Dark Energy Spectroscopic Instrument to the American Physical Society in Sacramento, California on April 4.

Located at the Kitt Peak National Observatory in Arizona, the Dark Energy Spectroscopic Instrument is capable of mapping 5,000 galaxies every 20 minutes. With collaboration from over 70 international institutions, by its fifth year, DESI is predicted to map over 30 million galaxies and 3 million quasars — otherwise known as supermassive black holes. By calculating the paths traveled by light, this

SEE **UNIVERSE**, PAGE 5

Einstein, an eclipse and Brazil walk into a bar

ANDRÉ AVERION
Mercury Staff

At the 2024 Solar Eclipse Panel Discussion that took place April 8, Professor of Physics and Astrophysics Mustapha Ishak-Boushaki retold the story of how a total solar eclipse in Brazil changed the world and brought Albert Einstein to fame, and how UTD added to the story 100 years later.

In 1919, the world accepted Albert Einstein’s work of general theory of relativity forever changed the understandings of modern physics and astronomy, yet the experiment that proved this theory wasn’t his own. It belonged to the mentor of Ishak-Boushaki’s mentor, Arthur Eddington, who proved Einstein’s theory

after measuring the gravitational deflection of starlight observed in a total solar eclipse in Sobral, Brazil.

“It’s about the fact that the space-time is curved by the sun,” Ishak-Boushaki said. “If you try to envision this [starlight trajectory], you won’t be able to because the sun is too bright. And here came a bright thought about the plan to use the eclipse to completely cover the sun so you can see the bright stars here and you can measure them. That’s the idea Arthur Eddington came up with.”

In 1911, Einstein proposed that light bends when it passes near a massive object of great mass – because of gravity – and challenged the scientific community to test his theory. This



COURTESY | UTD

Above: Mustapha Ishak-Boushaki.

Comet Comments: what did you think about the eclipse?



Maybe 3 of the 4 minutes of the totality were obscured by clouds unfortunately, but it heightened the tension. Everyone lost their minds when the clouds actually moved out of the way.
—**Josh Manigsaca,**
Animation, Games
ATEC



I was at the science building courtyard and we all laid on the grass, my friends and I, it was really fun ... The atmosphere of everyone watching it together ... was really cool.
—**Kayla Bui,**
Speech Language,
Hearing Sciences
junior



It was honestly a lot more intense than I expected. I was bit scared because of the cloud coverage. It was a lot better to experience it in person than to see it on TV. It was a surprisingly good place to meet new people.
—**Abdullah Janabi,**
Physics freshman



I almost missed [the eclipse] because I was getting Panda Express. I just think it’s cool that we got to witness an event ... and it happened to be right over campus, so that was a real eye-opening experience.
—**Micah Robles,**
Biology junior



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Police Blotter

March 24 - April 4

In the space of two weeks, at least seven thefts were reported at bike racks on campus. All are still under investigation.

April 2

An individual made a threat to publish intimate visual material, and the incident is under investigation.

April 5

Credit/debit card abuse was reported in PS4, and the incident has not yet been assigned to an officer.

April 6

An individual was found possessing possessing marijuana and carrying a weapon unlawfully. The charges were cleared by arrest.

April 9

Criminal mischief was reported in Lot A and was resolved through exceptional clearance.

A

B

C

D

E



LEGEND

- VEHICULAR INCIDENT
- THEFT
- DRUGS & ALCOHOL
- OTHER

Letter to the Editor: Be Comet Safe!

Courtesy of UTDPD

The UT Dallas Police Department would like to encourage our electric scooter and bicycle owners to follow the following recommendations in regard to securing your property to prevent theft.

- If you own an electric scooter, when possible, keep the scooter with you but do not ride inside of the buildings.
- When locking a bicycle or scooter at an approved rack, use a metal U-Shape style lock sometimes referred as “D-Locks.” A cable lock can be cut very quickly with bolt cutters.
- If you reside inside of a campus apartment, when possible secure your bicycle inside the apartment.
- Always have your serial number and model information available if needed to file a police report.
- If you observe anyone cutting and removing a lock from a bicycle or scooter, and the person is not wearing a UTD uniform, please contact the police department immediately.
- UT Dallas Crime Prevention Unit provides etching pens available free of charge to engrave your identifying information onto your property. Contact Crime Prevention at 972-883-4322 or at Spig@utdallas.edu to set up an appointment to etch your property.

Let’s be Comet Safe by working together!



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Comets: Upcoming vote on 'green' service fee

Students will vote on a \$5 tuition increase from April 24 to 26. The increase would fund environmental projects across campus



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY: KATHERYN HO | GRAPHICS EDITOR PHOTS BY: KATHERYN HO | GRAPHICS EDITOR, VEDANT SAPRA | MERCURY STAFF

Student Government believes that the fund if passed could be used to support new campus apiaries and the creation of more pollinator community gardens on top of anything students or faculty submit for review.

GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ
News Editor

All tuition-paying Comets will be able to vote on a fee referendum to support sustainable development and green projects on campus from April 24 to 26.

The referendum proposes the addition of a \$5 fee during fall and spring semesters and a \$2.50 fee during summer semesters, which will last a maximum of five years and would gather approximately \$150,000 per semester for the Green Fund. If passed, the Green Fund could provide funding for environment-focused initiatives like new apiaries, more pollinator gardens and a rainwater collection system for the Eco Hub, according to SG Green Initiative Committee's website. Since 2009, students at Texas public universities have been able to implement environmental service fees after HB 3353



ALISA MODEL

and SB 2182 became law. Alisa Model, chair of SG's Green Initiative Committee, said that there is currently no fund dedicated exclusively to sustainable efforts on campus and that the creation of the Green Fund would benefit both researchers and students. "The fund would be by students and for students," Model said. "It would greatly impact campus sustainability efforts as more projects get approved and funded, and opportunities would be practically endless based on what the campus community chooses to pitch to the committee." If successful, the "Green Referendum" would place UTD alongside universities such as UT Austin, Texas A&M and UNT, which previously implemented green fees. UT Austin has used their green fund to support over 200 projects with almost \$5 million. UNT has used its green fund to promote and fund projects related to on-campus community engagement, including a green wall, sustainable energy and more efficient waste reduction. Model said that all money collected by the fee would be pooled into a fund overseen by a student-majority committee, which would allocate the funds to various projects and

research on campus. "Don't just vote yes because other people are telling you to, do your research and think about what you could

“The fund would be by students and for students. It would greatly impact campus sustainability efforts... opportunities would be practically endless based on what the campus community chooses to pitch.”
—Alisa Model

do with this fund,” said Sneha Sharma, Green Initiative senator. “This money isn't just being taken from you, students can apply to use it, and I want people to start thinking about what initiatives they could take on campus with this

funding.” Students currently on fixed tuition plans will not pay the fee if the referendum passes. Incoming students, regardless of their tuition plan, would begin paying into the green fund once the fee is approved by the UT system — both those on fixed and variable tuition. Chad Thomas, senior associate vice president for Student Affairs, said that if passed, the fee increase would still require approval by the UT system board of regents. Thomas said that unlike previous, more expensive fee increases, the environmental service fee faces less hurdles after the student vote, as there is already a legislative basis in the 2009 laws. According to Thomas, if the vote is successful the planned start date of the fee will be fall 2025. “What we have been really sensitive to has been the desire to have a student majority committee which would be responsible for reviewing any projects which want to tap into those Green Fund resources,” Thomas said. “The committee would also likely if passed have a liaison from Student Affairs and other members of faculty.” Madison Ibe, Former Green Initiative chair and current Academic Affairs chair,

said UTD has previously attempted to pass an environmental service fee but was unsuccessful. In 2018, SG passed a resolution for a green fee and conducted a survey, but it was ultimately never implemented. The Office of Sustainability has been a consistent supporter of the fee, said Ibe and Senior Sustainability Coordinator Avery McKittrick. The fee referendum organizers will hold three informational town halls before voting begins, with both virtual and in-person meetings where Comets can ask questions. The first town hall will be on April 16 at 10 a.m. via Microsoft Teams. The second town hall will occur April 18 at 4 p.m. in the Student Union's Artemis Hall and the final meeting will be April 23 at 12 p.m. in Galaxy Room C. “Ecoanxiety is a big issue amongst our generation, and that feeling of helplessness that we get,” Sharma said. “The best way to tackle climate change is to actually do something about it. We aren't just going to sit on the sidelines and let it happen. If we are going to die, then we will die trying. This fund would give students the resources and opportunities they need.”

UTD to eliminate new Office of Campus Resources and Support

Twenty employee positions affiliated with OCRS were also eliminated. President Benson said the university made the decision after reevaluating its SB 17 compliance

FATIMAH AZEEM
Editor-in-Chief

After reevaluating its compliance with Texas' DEI higher education ban, UTD will eliminate the newly-formed Office of Campus Resources and Support and 20 associated jobs by April 30. President Richard Benson announced the elimination in an email to the student body April 9, making UTD the second school in the UT system to shut down offices created to fill the gap left by SB 17, which banned DEI offices at Texas universities effective Jan. 1. The first university

was UT Austin, which announced April 2 that it closed its Division of Campus and Community Engagement and laid off 60 employees working in diversity, equity and inclusion-related positions, as reported by the *Austin-American Statesman*. Eliminated positions at UTD include those held by professional staff members in OCRS. The AccessAbility Resource Center will continue to operate, providing disability and accessibility services to students under the Office of Academic Affairs. This resource for disabled students is federally protected under Section 504 of the Reha-

bilitation Act. Other centers under OCRS included the Galerstein Community Center, Comet Culture Center and the STEM Outreach and Education Center; it's unclear if these centers' services will be fully eliminated or moved to other university units. Benson said in the email that employees affected by the elimination of the positions had been notified and student workers in OCRS will retain their jobs until the end of the semester. He also said the university's Human Resources department will help the former staff members find future employment, which could include other open positions at the university. Benson told the *Dallas Morning News* in August that “no one will lose a job at UTD,” but “they might be in a different job.” In the April 9 email, he encouraged hiring managers to “give these experienced and talented individuals careful review when making their hiring decision.” “I know that this decision will not be welcomed by many in our campus community,” Benson said in the email. “I remain committed to ensuring that UT Dallas is a supportive community focused on developing the knowledge, the research and the people that are vital to our future.”

SEE ELIMINATION, PAGE 4



SURJADITYA SARKAR | MERCURY STAFF

On left: Debopreeta Bhattacharya. On right: Devin Schwartz.

Empower: ticket of the hour

Devin Schwartz and Debopreeta Bhattacharya to serve as SG's upcoming President and Vice President in the 2024-2025 academic school year

HYUN LIM
Mercury Staff

With the end of voting on April 5, Devin Schwartz and Debopreeta Bhattacharya were elected as Student Government president and vice president respectively. Schwartz, a computer science and philosophy junior, and Bhattacharya, a sociology junior, ran under the Empower Ticket with a campaign focused on three core principles: advocacy, engagement and solidarity. Schwartz and Bhattacharya hope to increase transparency about changes related to SB-17 and better con-

nect students to resources to promote events and advocate for a unified campus community. Schwartz has worked as an SG senator, as chair of the Technology Committee before its dissolution and as SG's Webmaster. Schwartz said he is excited to start serving as president. Bhattacharya, also a senator, has served as the chair of the Student Affairs Committee and served on the Homecoming Ad-Hoc Committee and said she is looking forward to continuing student traditions through pro-

SEE EMPOWER, PAGE 4



UTD COMETS GIVING DAY 2023 | COURTESY

Hassle of a hackathon

A peek behind the HackUTD veil: Past HackUTD organizers discuss what it takes to organize a 24-hour hackathon as students

REES BLATT
Mercury Staff

UTD hosts HackUTD every year since 2015; it is the largest hackathon in the state of Texas with around 1,000 attendees in 2023 alone. Planning for this massive endeavor falls entirely on students — how do these Comets manage such a large responsibility?

HackUTD is a 24-hour event where students from all majors come to UTD to build a software or hardware-based project. Operating as the second biggest 24-hour hackathon in America with over 1,000 hackers competing, organizing such a large event can be daunting. Being fully student-run, Comets in UTD's Association for Computing Machinery are responsible for obtaining funding from large companies, both for prize money and to provide food and merchandise to the attendees. The work behind the scenes in setting up these hackathons can be much larger than the events themselves, taking many months of continuous effort from the dozens of organizers.

Corporate sponsors play a large role in the contest, as without sponsors, ACM would be unable to fund the amenities. In the case of large hackathons such as HackUTD, many corporate sponsors are needed to fund the event. The 2023 iteration of HackUTD received sponsorship from 11 large companies, including Toyota, State Farm and Goldman Sachs. With it, they were able to fund over \$30,000 in prizes, in addition to the free food and merchandise provided to all the students who attend. Students are tasked with making new connections with companies and maintaining pre-existing ones in order to secure funding year after year.

"We have some really talented organizers who all work at different internships," said Salman Jaher, HackUTD co-director. "Anybody who works at a company will have a recruiter contact to reach out to, and we definitely leverage that."

Once funding is secured, students must plan for the free food and merchandise offered at the hackathon. Consulting with graphic design departments, they mock up in-house designs for merchandise. Many items must be hand-designed and ordered months in advance so they can be produced and shipped overseas at a reasonable price in time for the competition.

Vendors are contacted months in advance to iron out the logistics of providing hundreds of meals to the registered attendees. As the years have progressed, admission into the hackathon has become more competitive, since every attending student must be fed for the duration of the event. Currently, the typical expectation



Hundreds of hackers from across the nation attend the UTDHack, making it the second largest 24 hour Hackathon in the U.S.

HACKUTD | COURTESY

of attendance to HackUTD's flagship events is around 1,000 in-person students.

During the hackathon, the entire team of organizers along with dozens of student volunteers are responsible for keeping things moving. Generally held in ECSW, dozens of tables need to be set up on every floor to accommodate the one hundred teams, many of whom have traveled across the U.S. and sometimes internationally to participate in HackUTD.

To run the event successfully, a custom website known as hackportal is developed to keep track of the attendants and organizers. This stores their dietary restrictions and saves the information they use to redeem meals, as well as initial check-in information in the form of a QR code. Comets, including computer science senior Nam Truong, work on the backside of the event by designing event software; every year, thousands of students create accounts on HackUTD's website as they sign up for the

competition.

"When I first joined, I had no experience at all, they took me in as a tech member. Starting freshman year I developed more skills while working on the website," Truong said. "[I gained] hands-on experience while working on a team ... HackUTD gave me a huge boost in experience, being able to learn the tech side of things."

The final hurdle is organizing judging, as every project needs to be fairly assessed by an experienced student or professor. In prior years, this has proven extremely difficult to manage, as ideally judging should encompass several hours at the very end of the event. Grading criteria are created by the event organizers, encompassing several general categories which projects are judged against. Through several rounds of judging, projects are gradually filtered down to eventually reveal the winners for each respective category.



HACKUTD | COURTESY

At UTDHack, event goes break up into teams which work together to develop software or hardware related projects.

In Memoriam: First undergraduate executive dean Regina Kyle

Regina Mary Jane Kyle, who died on April 2, was a pioneer of undergraduate studies at UTD and the first female dean of the university



UTD | COURTESY

ANDRÉ AVERION
Mercury Staff

Regina Mary Jane Kyle, the first undergraduate executive dean and first female dean in UTD history, died April 2 at the age of 88 in her home in Falmouth, Massachusetts.

In 1973, Kyle became the Executive Dean for Undergraduate Studies, laying the foundation of UTD's modern undergraduate program during her 10-year tenure. UTD was a graduate-only school until 1975, when Kyle brought in the first undergraduate juniors and seniors for a tuition of \$195 and was in charge when the first bachelor's degree was awarded at UTD in 1976. During this time, she also served as a trustee of KERA News and the Richardson Symphony Orchestra.

Kyle received two bachelor's degrees in 1963 from Regis College in Weston, Massachusetts, one in arts and the

other in English, while spending most of her time as an active member of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Boston, an international Catholic congregation of women dedicated to uplifting communities and tackling social crises. Within the next year, Kyle began studying at Harvard University and received a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature in 1970, but not before completing a two-year study abroad program at the University of Birmingham in England for Shakespeare and Renaissance Studies. Following her graduation, Kyle was invited as an elected faculty board member at Harvard until she left for employment as Executive Dean for Undergraduate Studies at UTD, which was only 12 years old at the time.

After her tenure at UTD, Kyle became CEO of the Kyle Group LTD in 1983 at Westport, Massachusetts, where, for 32 years, she oversaw the

design and development of programs that supported institutions and communities by improving consulting economic development and art education. Most notably, in 2009, Kyle received a Doctorate in Public Service honoris causa for lifetime services to education from the Spalding University, a private Catholic university in Louisville, Kentucky.

In 2016, Kyle moved to Falmouth, Massachusetts, founding and serving as CEO of The Creative Apothecary, which served as a consulting service that provided a variety of community resources like the Resources Guides on the Arts and Wellness, School of Creative Aging and the Kyle Studio.

Kyle's funeral was held at the Holy Family Church in Rockland, Massachusetts, on April 12.

ELIMINATION CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

The closures at UTD and UT come after Sen. Brandon Creighton, who authored SB 17, warned that lawmakers could freeze millions of dollars of funding to Texas universities and take legal action for noncompliance with the law. The Senate Committee on Higher Education will conduct a hearing in May for the UT system to prove its institutions are complying with SB 17. Legislators will scrutinize how institutions, including UTD, have ensured that there are no DEI offices or trainings and only



BRANDON CREIGHTON

including UTD, have ensured that there are no DEI offices or trainings and only

merit-based hiring, which prohibits diversity statements and consideration of race, sex, color, ethnicity or national origin in the hiring process.

"I am deeply concerned with the possibility that many institutions may choose to merely rename their offices or employee titles," Creighton said in a letter to the UT System Chancellor and Board of Regents on March 26. "This letter should serve as notice that this practice is unacceptable."

Sen. Creighton described SB 17 as one of the most restrictive DEI bans in the country, and it is among eight laws and one executive order nationwide that bans DEI at public colleges. When OCRS was established on Jan. 1, it sought to "ensure that UTD [met] the needs of students" and aimed to "enhance student community-building and supporting employees and employee resource groups" in an SB 17-compliant way. In February, conservative watchdog organization Accuracy in Media featured UTD employees talk-

ing about DEI in a secretly-filmed compilation of videos. The report suggested that UTD, among other universities, was employing "creative" strategies to pursue DEI, including renaming or rebranding offices.

The Texas NAACP called UTD's re-compliance after Jan. 1 "unnecessary" in a statement to The Mercury. Texas NAACP previously released a joint statement with the Texas American Association of University Professors arguing against UT's decision to terminate staff; UT President Jay Hartzell had reassured staff that their employment was not in jeopardy.

"The systematic elimination of important positions because of SB 17 and the Creighton letter is itself an act of First Amendment retaliation and likely discrimination," President of Texas NAACP Gary Bledsoe said about UTD. "It will only serve to dumb down the university because it will possibly cause the loss of substantial research funds, impact its accreditation and standing in the national

academic community and discourage talented students, faculty and staff from desiring to affiliate."

Nandita Kumar, Student Government's Diversity, Equity and Belonging Chair, said that her committee is encouraging student organizations to join a newly-formed campus coalition called Coalition of Agents for Student Advocacy. The goal of the coalition is to act as a campus-wide mouthpiece for DEI-related student concerns and provide resources and programming through student organizations which are exempt from SB 17. It is open for all organizations to join, regardless of their mission.

"We are creating a united front," Kumar said. "I want to make it clear to the student body that this is something that's going to require us to put in the work. For real change to happen, students across UTD are going to have to join these united efforts. If you generally support DEI on campus, you are welcome to join this [coalition]."

Kumar encourages students to speak directly to their legislators and elected representatives, emphasizing that the focus should be on lawmakers and not UTD administrators. Elected representatives for UTD include Mihaela Plesa of TX-HD 70, Angie Chen Button of TX-HD 112 and Nathan Johnson of Senate District 16. Texas Students for DEI, a statewide coalition with representatives from major Texas universities including Kumar from UTD, provides resources on how to contact state representatives, including mass email templates, on their Instagram page.

"We can be powerful, but we have to come together for that," Kumar said. "Everyone has a role to play in this movement because we live in a world where these harmful draconian bills are being passed. And unfortunately that burden is going to fall on us. This is our chance to show them that we are seeing what they are doing."

ECLIPSE COVERS CAMPUS



Thousands gather on campus to observe a once-in-a-lifetime eclipse. SURJADITYA SARKAR, SHREYA RAVI | MERCURY STAFF



While we watched the eclipse, they studied the sky

ANDRÉ AVERION
Mercury Staff

During the April 8 total solar eclipse, associate physics professor Fabiano Rodrigues led a team of student researchers in probing the ionosphere, collecting data on how parts of the sky change during an eclipse and affect satellite transmissions.

Rodrigues has been a long time expert in the ionosphere, the electrified upper region of the atmosphere, since his arrival to campus in 2012, and the eclipse provided a unique opportunity to study the behavior and change

of total electrons in the ionosphere during the phenomenon. This research could potentially improve the precision of radio waves and GPS systems, which rely on the ionosphere for signal transmission.

“There are many ways that the ionosphere can affect signals used for communication, navigation or remote sensing,” Rodrigues said. “For instance, precise GPS position calculation requires that ionospheric delays be accounted for. Additionally, small scale ionospheric perturbations also cause diffraction and fluctuations in the phase or amplitude of GPS signals,

which are detrimental to the receiver's ability to track these signals.”

Nearly two years ago, Rodrigues’ team was working on low-cost ionospheric sensors in their lab, made to collect radio signals from the ionosphere. Dubbed ScintPi sensors, student researchers instead found an unexpected use for them when the ScintPi sensors picked up a solar radio burst. From there, the sensors became a prime tool for their investigation measuring the annular eclipse in 2023, where there was a drastic drop in electrons in the ionosphere.

“Careful analyses of the signals can provide us with information about the signal delay caused by the ionosphere, which is proportional to the ionospheric ionization or total electron content,” Rodrigues said. “We used modified receivers with dedicated signal acquisition systems and special signal analyses to derive how total electron content near Dallas varied with time and how much the total eclipse impacted it.”

During the campus event for the solar eclipse — No Comets Left Inside — Rodrigues and his family were joined by mem-

bers of the research team including electrical engineering graduate student Josemaria Sócola, physics graduate student Alexander Massoud and physics graduate student Isaac Wright. They provided live results of the ScintPi sensors at the science pavilion, and stood by to answer questions while collecting data.

“We had a lot of fun enjoying the eclipse with other UTD faculty members, staff and students,” Rodrigues said. “[We] quantified how the ionosphere behaved during the eclipse. The temporal variation of total electron count before, during and after the eclipse.

ECLIPSE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

theory was quickly proven incomplete, as Einstein argued that light would bend at an angle of 0.83 arcseconds. However, when tested by others, Einstein's math was off and didn't align with real world results. After a blow to his reputation, Einstein reevaluated his work, leading to a new value of 1.75 arcseconds in a four-part paper of general relativity published in 1915, where he

would then again challenge the scientific community to test his theory in the real world.

During World War I, this updated theory reached the interest of astronomer Eddington, a leader in solar eclipse expenditure and research, whose own student would eventually mentor Ishak-Boushaki. Eddington mobilized his resources to venture to a total solar eclipse that came May 29, 1919, when Eddington arrived in Sobral a few months after the war ended. In

just a handful of minutes, Eddington saw the measurement align correctly with Einstein's new prediction, and within the next few months, Eddington successfully argued against the Royal Society and published his findings. It brought Einstein to international prominence, and opened entirely new avenues of understanding gravity, light and space still used today.

Standing where Eddington witnessed Einstein's theory in action is now the Museum of

Eclipse in Sobral, Brazil, where UTD would be invited to take part in history nearly 100 years later. The International Astronomical Union hosted the Centenary of Solar Eclipses of 1919 - Sobral, in 2019, during which Sobral declared and celebrated the Year of Science with some of the worlds greatest astrophysicist and cosmologist for the 100th anniversary of the eclipse.

Invited to lead the celebration as the inaugural speaker representing UTD, Ishak-Boushaki

had the honor to open the ceremony with the university's own findings and presented the latest advancement in the fields.



EMPOWER CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

moting events.

“This was a really competitive election,” Bhattacharya said. “Devin and I had two opposing tickets, great tickets with great ideas that definitely a lot of students were attracted to ... I'm very happy and glad that I was able to be around my fellow candidates, [and] see their ideas and how they wanted to run Student Government if they were elected, because I think it's good to have those perspectives as well.”

Schwartz and Bhattacharya specifically plan to reach out to more student organizations to get more student voices and opinions involved with Student Government and its resolutions, like what they did when reaching out to organizations such as Comets for Better Transit, UTD Democrats and Students Demand Action for campaign endorsements. Bhattacharya said she also hopes to continue to work with Schwartz to uphold the three pillars of Empower Ticket. One specific pillar Bhattacharya hopes to focus on is advocacy, such as bringing back early voting locations back on campus.

“Students working together is ultimately

what's going to create change, and that's what we want to see happen,” Bhattacharya said.

Schwartz and Bhattacharya also hope to improve SG's engagement by creating a social media and an in-person presence for Student Government that will help students know more about the organization and the resources and events students can get access to. They also hope to focus on solidarity through talking to administration directly when student issues arise to create an environment where students can feel comfortable voicing concerns.

“I think we joke about [the lack of] it, but there definitely is a school spirit here,” Schwartz said. “All the passions that students have for various causes, whether that be research, their careers, social causes, and I think our goal should be empowering them as much as we can and enabling them to continue achieving those goals and enjoying their time here.”

Schwartz is interested in civil rights law and hopes to develop skills during his presidency that he can use to help more people within his community after graduation, while working to make student voices heard at UTD.

“I think that giving back to the community and making sure that I'm helping people in the way that I can while I'm here is really important to me,” Schwartz said.

Bhattacharya said her creativity allows her to bring a unique approach to the projects she pursues, and she hopes to continue bringing her creativity to her vice-presidency. Bhattacharya is already experienced in making engaging events like Blank Space and Finals Scream on campus. Bhattacharya said she and Schwartz joining forces as president and vice president will allow them to make a bigger impact on the student body than they could separately.

“Devin is very level-headed [and] calm,” Bhattacharya said. “When it comes to working on stressful kind of areas, he'll be really good at tackling that and maybe calming me down so that I don't go off the rails ... he's a great person to work with, because we can bounce ideas off of each other and it's never like he has an idea, I don't, I have an idea, he doesn't [because] we both have these great ideas, we both have points we want to talk about. If we combine those ... we will be able to make sure that we can reach our goals.”

Bhattacharya and Schwartz's passion for



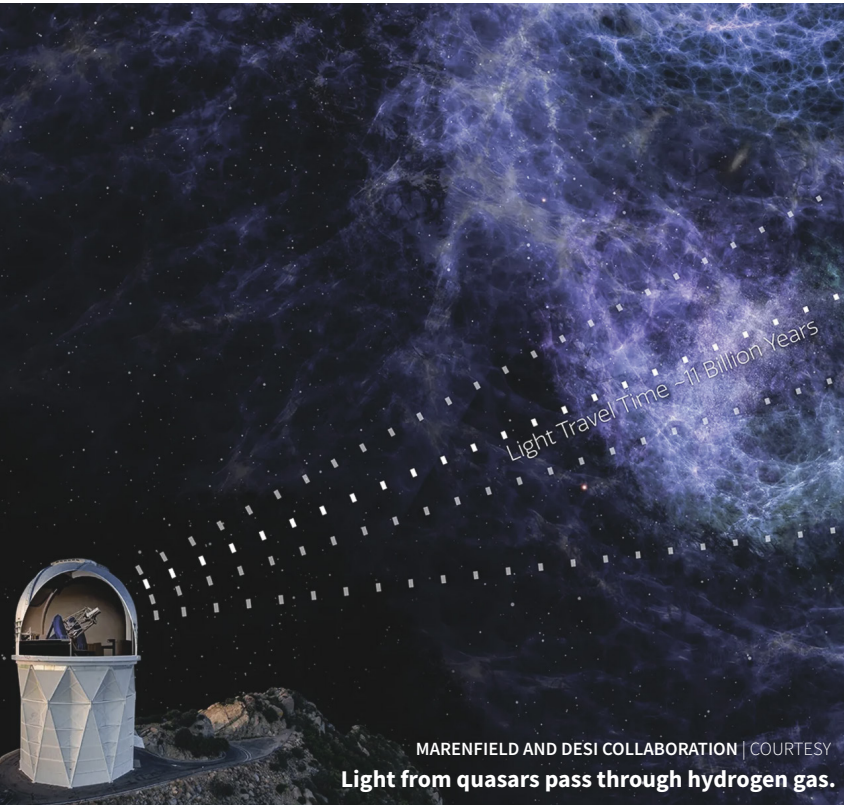
advocacy and making sure that everyone's voices are heard motivates them to make sure UTD's student body feels empowered throughout their leadership terms.

“We don't just want to be these district representatives that are just representing them,” Bhattacharya. “We want students to know that they can feel comfortable reaching out to us about



SURJADITYA SARKAR | MERCURY STAFF

what they want to see done, about what their concerns are about, and we will advocate for them directly to administration or directly to whatever method we need to use to make sure that gets addressed.”



MARENFIELD AND DESI COLLABORATION | COURTESY
Light from quasars pass through hydrogen gas.

UNIVERSE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

leading model provides new insights into measuring the speed at which the universe expanded for over 11 billion years.

Current interpretations of the model map suggest that dark energy — which accounts for 68% of all energy in the universe and is thought to be responsible for the mysterious acceleration of our expanding universe — is decreasing. In modern astrophysics and cosmology, dark energy is understood to be a constant in physics, so if the model is correct, then our interpretation of the universe and theories like The Big Bang Theory may be incomplete.

“DESI found hints that a characteristic of this dark energy changes over time. This would mean that this is not a cosmological constant,” Ishak-Boushaki said to the *Dal-*

las Morning News. “This has been a mystery for 25 years. This discovery opens the door for us to go after it and learn more about its nature.”

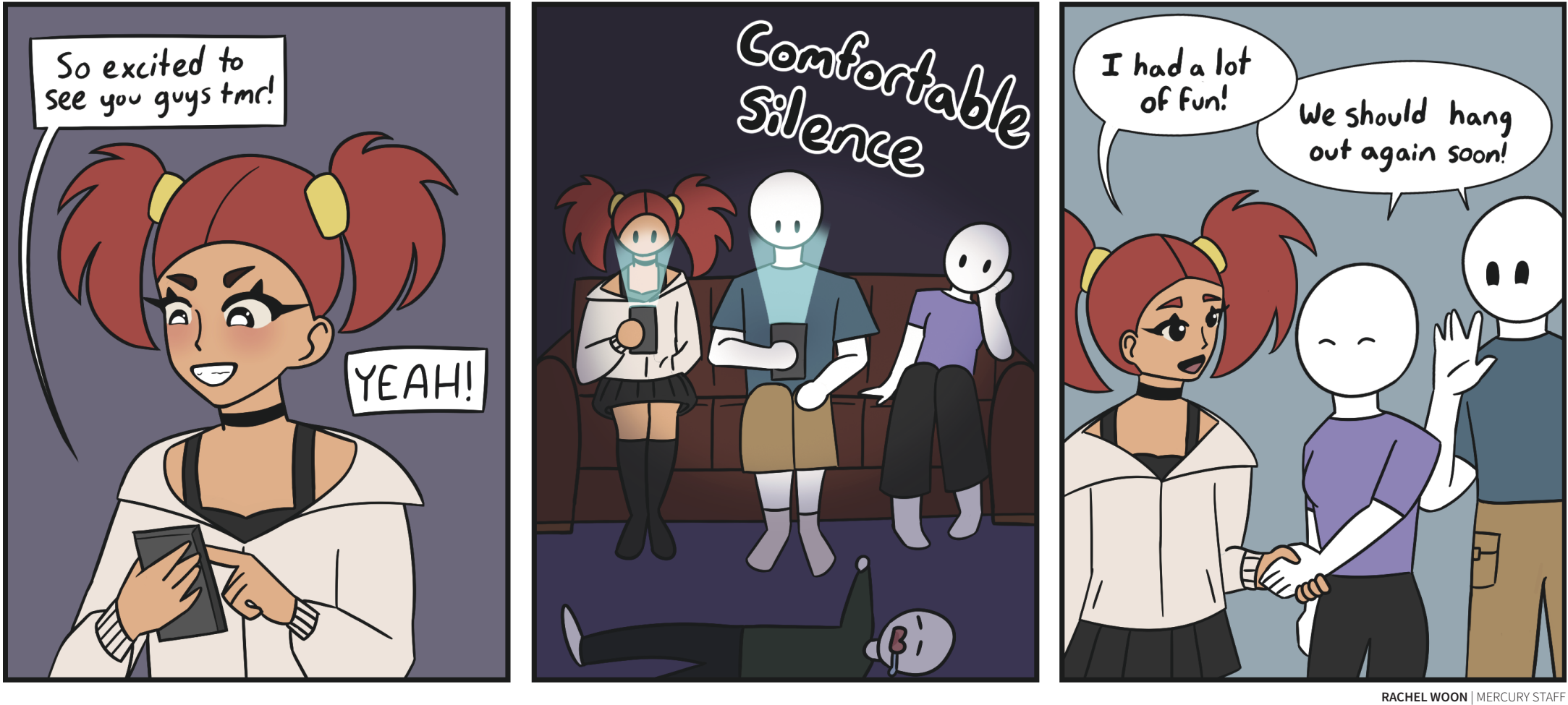
As one of over 900 scientists working on DESI, Ishak-Boushaki is the lead co-chair on the Cosmology Parameter Estimation WG of the science committee with fellow co-chair, Arnaud De Mattia, an academic researcher from the Université Paris-Saclay in France. Ishak-Boushaki was one of the primary scientists that published key research within the first year of the DESI project, contributing to data models and measurements using baryon acoustic oscillations. Baryon acoustic oscillations are pressured sound waves that froze in place with the introduction of light in the universe and are currently used as a standard metric of measurement in cosmology since they are one of the few things in the

universe that do not move.

Along with Ishak-Boushaki's presentation of this information, DESI publicly released early data of the map, which includes for 1.2 million galaxies and quasars at 80 terabytes of data. The project is only within its third year out of its expected five-year study, which the data for is still being interpreted.

“The more data we collect, the better equipped we will be to determine whether this finding holds,” Ishak-Boushaki said to the UTD News Center. “With more data, we might identify different explanations for the result we observe or confirm it. If it persists, such a result will shed some light on what is causing cosmic acceleration and provide a huge step in understanding the evolution of our universe.”

LET'S HANG OUT



RACHEL WOON | MERCURY STAFF

DOGE DOES HOMEWORK



ERIN GUTSCHKE | MERCURY STAFF

TUTORIAL



MADABUCHI OKORO | MERCURY STAFF

Student art showcase

Want to show off your art to fellow Comets? Send yours to graphics@utdm Mercury.com to be featured.

LUNA, MY LITTLE PONY



BERYL ZHU | MERCURY STAFF

Location x3 key

1	U	N	H	A	P	6	T	I	N	T	O	10	I	L	I	D
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32	A	R	I	C	H	35	S	E	T	37	N	O	O	N	E	
38	R	A	D	I	I	40	P	T	A	43	I	N	U	S	E	
42	I	D	I	N	G	45	E	A	T	47	E	S	S	E	N	
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74	I	R	I	S	77	A	R	C	O	79	A	R	I	D	E	
80	C	A	N	S	83	Y	E	E	T	85	R	E	N	T	S	

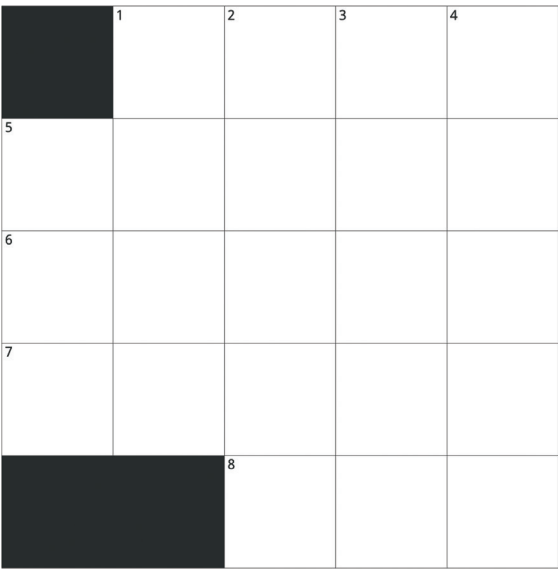
4.1 Sudoku key

9	6	8	7	4	1	2	3	5
4	5	2	6	8	3	1	9	7
1	7	3	9	5	2	4	6	8
3	4	5	2	7	8	9	1	6
7	2	9	1	6	5	3	8	4
8	1	6	3	9	4	7	5	2
2	9	7	5	1	6	8	4	3
5	3	4	8	2	9	6	7	1
6	8	1	4	3	7	5	2	9

4.15 Sudoku

6			4	5	3	9	7	
4						3		
			6					
2								
9		1	7	3		5	4	
			4				9	
	7				1		2	
		8		6				
3			5	9		8		

OH,
GREAT



ABOVE

- Great dog breed
- Pay tribute to
- Spend, as a bag
- Great bodies of water
- Great primate

DOWN

- Nickelodeon explorer
- Minnesota town that dubbed itself the Halloween Capital of the World
- Depression symptom
- Clear the board
- "Good" cholesterol initials

ALANA PLATT | MERCURY STAFF

MARCO FRESCAS: THE DJ KING OF CAMPUS



SOFIA MEINARDUS
Mercury Staff

Computer science junior Marco Frescas aims to transform the social landscape of UTD through his passion for music and DJing, which brings vibrant events and a focus on electronic music to the community. From his early fascination with electronic dance music to his involvement with Radio UTD, Frescas seeks to create a space where students can reflect on life. With DJ sets on and off campus, Frescas’ interest in EDM goes back to his childhood, when he witnessed the “EDM boom” — a period of growth for the genre from the late 2000s to 2010s. Inspired by artists like David Guetta and Swedish House Mafia, his childhood dream of becoming a DJ laid the foundation for future endeavors in producing music.

“[Music] has been following me since I first gained consciousness,” Frescas said. “I’ve [now] been able to just kind of lock myself into this little bubble of music.”

Computer science sophomore Henry Jones, who met Frescas through Radio UTD, said Frescas is a proficient and passionate DJ, whose talent captivated him early on. When Frescas joined Radio UTD, Jones said he influenced Radio to move from sim-

plistic setups to professional DJ equipment, pushing for a shift towards more engagement with the station’s mixer and implementing live transitions between songs during events like DJ Fest. Jones said Frescas has an infectious passion that extends beyond performances.

“It is really his drive to be a performer. When he is up on the decks, it is him in his own world. Nothing else matters except the music and the crowd, and it’s a joy to watch,” Jones said. “You can see the drive behind his eyes. It’s infectious.”

Frescas said his involvement with Radio UTD has been instrumental in developing his DJing skills. Through his radio show and DJ sets, Frescas said he found a way to break out of his shell and confidently express himself. Reflecting on the structure of his radio show, he said variety and relaxation are important, aiming to provide show listeners with the calming effect of music. Frescas said music helped heal him and helped him communicate emotions when words fall short.

“Music speaks for me,” Frescas

“Music speaks for me. And that’s really the power of that, you know? I just want to allow myself to see, to hear.”

— Marco Frescas

said. “And that’s really the power of that, you know? I want to just allow myself to see, to hear, just allow yourself to really listen to the music.”

Frescas said he discovers new tracks on platforms like Bport, ensuring variety and flow in his playlists for the radio show, considering factors like beats per minute and genre cohesion. Despite occasional challenges, like only garnering 2-5 listeners on his radio show, Frescas said he found solace in the opportunity to be able to share the music he loves. Having a platform to express himself creatively also led to one of the highlights of Frescas’ journey, his DJ set at the DJ Fest, where he won DJ of the semester.

“I’ve had about three or four sets, and although I suffer from impostor syndrome, hearing people praise my DJing and seeing them enjoy the EDM scene makes me incredibly happy and motivated to potentially bring more music-focused events to UTD,” Frescas said.

Frescas takes inspiration from his experience with raves and from artists like Spencer Brown, who revitalized the techno scene at Duke University. Frescas said he aims to grow rave culture at UTD, with a shift away from typical frat parties centered on

drinking to gatherings that highlight music.

“It’s important to me because I’ve experienced the impact of these events myself and want to share that with others, especially at UTD, where there’s a need for more social engagement and positive experiences beyond just academics,” Frescas said. “The focus needs to go back to the music.”

Rajiv Prasad, a business management junior at North Lake College, has known Frescas for seven years. Prasad said he noticed the hold music has on Frescas from their first interaction, shown by his constant companion: a pair of earbuds. This attachment, Prasad said, has developed an understanding from a technical perspective of what the creation of any work of music is supposed to entail as well as an understanding of the emotional reaction music can elicit.

“His entire thing is music ... he doesn’t seem to find anything more important than furthering the message of how therapeutic music can be to a person,” Prasad said. “If people were to pay closer attention to the music for just

Frescas said the power of music is to create meaningful experiences and foster connections, living by the motto “life is made of small moments like these” from the band Above and Beyond. Looking ahead, Frescas wants to organize events like “Open Decks,” a platform for aspiring DJs to showcase their talent and gain exposure to performing. Also, Frescas aims to release an EP on an established label within five years and produce an album while touring within a decade.

“I kind of have like a 10-year plan for myself ... I want to show people that there’s a whole world out there, music-wise ... there’s a social life out here that’s just waiting to be revived,” Frescas said. “And, hopefully, I’ll be able to find just someone out there who can share the same love for that.”



five to 10 minutes, they could find something beautiful in said music and in the community around them.”



YIYI DING | MERCURY STAFF

'Masters of the Air' flies flat

Masters of the Air crashes into a sea of mundanity through poor characterization, pacing

MIA NGUYEN
Mercury Staff

Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks share a passion for exposing viewers to authentic and carefully crafted war stories, and both Hollywood icons came together in 2024 to produce their third World War II miniseries, “Masters of the Air.” The show had unlimited potential with a great cast and historical accuracy, but it ultimately flew too close to the sun with lazy characterization and inconsistent pacing.

The miniseries “Masters of the Air” is based on real-life airmen and follows their journey in the 100th Bomb Group, also known as the “Bloody Hundredth” because of the heavy losses they suffered while destroying targets in German-occupied Europe. The brotherhood formed during their time at the Air Force base and in the skies is

the heart of the show, and portrays historical events with a humanistic light. Hanks’ and Spielberg’s previous miniseries, “Band of Brothers” and “The Pacific,” are the holy grail of WWII shows for any history buff, created with incredible attention to detail regarding filming locations, costumes, military boot camps for the actors and historical accuracy in writing. While their new Air Force series was equally incredible in terms of aesthetics, it failed to have the same level of immersion of its predecessors.

While “Masters of the Air” has a similar plot to many of its predecessors — following U.S. military figures’ journeys up to Hitler’s surrender in a short number of episodes with a star-studded cast — its pacing was its downfall. It seemed like a disjointed mish mash of poorly executed flight sequences and brief character interactions, justified by unexplained time skips. In an attempt to squeeze in

every bit of Bloody Hundredth history, every plotline lost meaning because of the rushed nature of the scenes. There was a big focus on seemingly real-time aerial battles, with each battle only lasting minutes with devastating outcomes. While the realism of the flight gear and the model planes was extraordinary, the visual confusion destroyed any emotional impact the violence might have had. The oxygen masks coupled with the quick jump cuts between planes made it difficult to understand the outcomes of the battles, and even after these monumental flights, the impact of the scenes is unexplained. It is up to the viewer to piece together what happened to the characters.

The pacing also seemed to showcase the creators’ indecision and lack of focus on their cast. Even with the lengthy episodes, the

SEE AIR, PAGE 8

Deep Vellum expands literary and translation options in North Texas

PAOLA MARTINEZ
Mercury Staff

The smell of coffee welcomes guests into Deep Velum, a small bookstore where a curated selection of translated books from every corner of the world fills shelves top to bottom. These translated works transport readers to all corners of the Earth — from well-known Japan to smaller countries like the island nation of São Tomé and Príncipe.

Deep Vellum started as a publishing house in 2013 and opened a nonprofit indie bookstore in 2015 under Will Evans, a publisher, translator, entrepreneur and UTD professor. The small bookstore sits at the intersection of S. Walton Street and Commerce Street and specializes in publishing and selling translated literary works from all over the world. Writers include authors both from the Dallas area — like poet and inaugural Poet Laureate Joaquin Zihuantanejo — and those from abroad —

like Norwegian author and 2023 Nobel Prize winner, Jon Fosse. Selections including short stories, poetry, romance, fiction, nonfiction and more can be found sifting through the bookstore.

“[Our] mission is to pick books that you can’t find anywhere else in Dallas,” said Abigail Lesage, literature senior and Deep Vellum bookseller. “I really like that a lot of the books [at Deep Vellum] I don’t know, or I’ve never heard of before, which to me is very refreshing. And I see other people say that that’s refreshing as well.”

Evans said he always had a love of literature but never expected to be the owner of a publishing house and bookstore. After five years of touring with a band and working in the music industry, he felt he needed a change and settled in Austin. While in Austin, Evans tried his hand at translation after reading Vilnius Poker by Ričardas Gavelis, translated by Elizabeth Novickas. This book introduced

Evans to publisher Chad W. Post, who became his mentor in creating Deep Vellum.

“For us, literature becomes this way to build the bridge into connectivity between individuals and between entire cultures,” Evans said.

Evans created Deep Vellum after noticing not enough published translated books and decided to fill this gap in the book industry. He said it took him 5 years to get Deep Vellum off the ground, because of its nonprofit status. Without any prior knowledge of how to get started, he embarked on a solo journey of what he wanted to create.

“I started [Deep Vellum] because I had to create the thing I wanted to see in the world,” Evans said. “That kind of entrepreneurship is fun, bold, but the mistake I made was that I did it alone.”

About 3% of books published in the U.S.

SEE BOOKS, PAGE 9



SURJADITYA SARKAR | MERCURY STAFF

Will Evans, founder and owner of Deep Vellum, dedicates himself to publishing, writing and translating books across a broad range of literary genres and languages.

Comet Gala

A night among the stars

PAOLA MARTINEZ
Mercury Staff

It's Friday, and old-timey swing music plays from the speakers as the ATC building resembles a prom night, bustling with students dressed in gowns and suits. The AIGA club hosted its third annual Comet Gala, encouraging students to dress to the nines, and Comets did not disappoint.

The Comet Gala's theme this year was "A Night Among the Stars," held April 12 at 7 p.m. in the ATC building. The first floor of the building held photo-booths, the performers' stage and a red carpet to encourage Comets to dress elegantly in an old Hollywood style. The second floor was strictly home to all vendors and student organizations participating in the gala, like KittynCap Labs, Baking for a Cause, Artters and Crafters and many more. The theme "A Night Among the Stars" showed Comets to be the real stars of the event with their unique sense of fashion.

Event coordinator and ATEC senior Rez Acosta said AIGA brainstormed different ideas for the theme of the event. The name took advantage of the phrase 'met gala' — embedded inside the title Comet Gala — encouraging Comets to discover the most glamorous version of themselves.

"I think that we should just take it and run with it and encourage people to treat it like the Met Gala if they so choose," Acosta said. "If you want to come in a crazy dress that you hand made, I happily implore you to do so."

Trisha Agrawal, a computer science junior at UT Austin, accompanied her boyfriend, Gaurav Kulkarni, an electrical engineering senior, wearing a floor-length navy dress and a cream-colored faux fur bolero. Her

dress had a uniform pattern of grey and white dots, which twinkled every time they caught light. Agrawal said that her dress was from two years ago at Kulkarni's prom. She said she was happy to be able to wear it again instead of letting it sit in her closet for an indefinite amount of time.

"Outside of high school prom, I really would've never gotten the chance to dress up like this again," Agrawal said.

Keon Ohimai, a global business junior, wore a gold and green suit to match the golden stars decorating the first floor of the ATC building. Like Agrawal, Ohimai's suit was also the outfit they wore to prom. They said the theme of the Comet Gala was a nice way for Comets who are more reserved to dress in a glamorous way and have fun.

"I love seeing people on campus dressed up because you don't really see people here too often express themselves creatively outwards," Ohimai said.

Katelynn Tran, a 2023 alum with a bachelor's in biochemistry, wore a purple button down with a grey vest, tie and black pants to fit with the theme of "A Night Among the Stars." Her outfit was business-themed and formal; Tran said she didn't want to just wear all black to the event, so she opted for a purple button that reminded her of the night sky. While manning her booth, Kittn-Cap Labs, in the artist alley, she

said she appreciated attendees' range of outfit styles, from gothic, to artsy, to casual.

"I think I saw someone with a skull mask, and there's definitely some florals going around and solid pieces as well, which are a timeless classic, and you have people who just came from class," Tran said. "Everyone has their own distinct sense of style."

Although most attendees opted for a prom-style outfit in theme with the gala, Gail Hernandez, a computer science senior, wore a black Lolita skirt, black tights, a black shirt, black platform shoes and silver necklaces and jewelry to finish off a Gothic look. She said she didn't have anything that would match the event's aesthetic of old Hollywood glamour, but that didn't stop her from dressing up in her own way.

"I've always been into frillier clothes

and a darker aesthetic," Hernandez said.

As part of the Comet Gala's itinerary, the UTD Fashion Club performed a runway show focused on the glamorous retro Hollywood aspect of the theme. The Fashion Club gave "A Night Among the Stars" a modern twist to it by using various silhouettes and types of fabric. Lauren Mangu, a physics junior and president of the Fashion Club, said she hopes to leave attendees in awe of their fashion show and to inspire them to become more expressive in their fashion.

"I think fashion is a huge way to have inclusivity when it comes to freedom of expression, with wearing whatever you want, how it makes you feel, regardless of what societal standards hold," Mangu said.

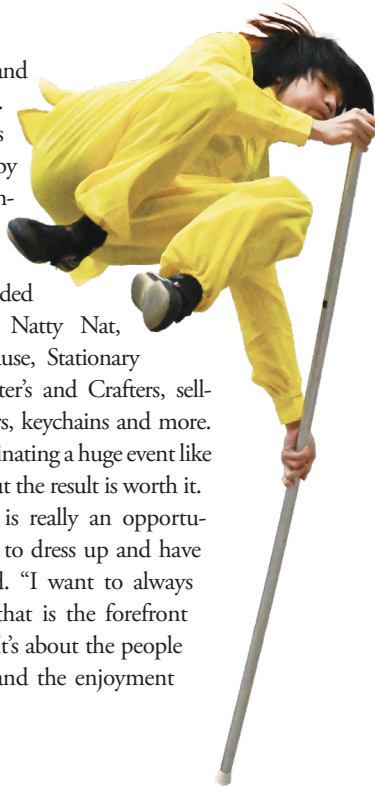
AIGA's third annual Comet Gala included performances by Dallas Musical Outreach, Kung Fu Club, Fashion Club,

Strings Attached and Novis Acapella. Photo booths were provided by MUSE and Indigo Magazine. Comet Gala vendors included KittnCap Labs, Natty Nat, Baking for a Cause, Stationary Charms, and Arter's and Crafters, selling prints, stickers, keychains and more. Acosta said coordinating a huge event like this is stressful, but the result is worth it.

"Comet Gala is really an opportunity for students to dress up and have fun," Acosta said. "I want to always make sure that that is the forefront of Comet Gala. It's about the people that come here and the enjoyment that they find."



PHOTOS: RORY MOORE | MERCURY STAFF
GRAPHICS: KATHERYN HO | GRAPHICS EDITOR,
ANIKTA SULTANA | MERCURY STAFF



SHREYA RAVI | MERCURY STAFF

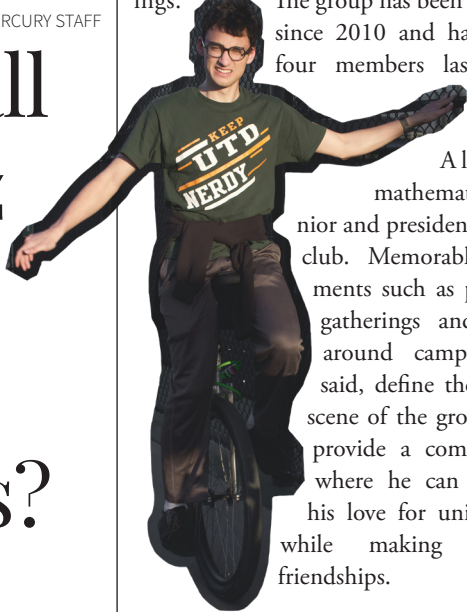
What's all the buzz about UTD's beehives?

ARDRA TREVEDI
Mercury Staff

Amid violet, pink and blue flowers, an apiary sits nestled in a strange place — directly next to Parking Lot A. This apiary serves as one of the havens for commercial beekeeping on campus and as an educational opportunity for students at UTD.

Scott Rippel, one of the professors for UTD's Honey Bee Biology course, is using these fuzzy creatures to educate students about their biology and sweet benefits. Honey Bee Biology — or BIOL 3388 — is an upper-elective course offered to Biology majors. Alongside a semester trip to the apiary, this class offers a deep insight into the most mesmerizing parts of honeybees' lifestyle, such as their dance-

SEE **APIARY**, PAGE 9



SOFIA MEINARDUS
Mercury Staff

Juggling life and school can be difficult for college students, but the UTD Unicycle Club members balance it all atop their single wheel. These unicyclers gather together to navigate the college experience and build a community characterized by laughter, members said.

The Unicycle Club, an official student organization at UTD, meets on Thursdays from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the Tennis Courts, where members learn unicycling tricks for fun. The group welcomes all skill levels, and anyone can join, with unicycles provided for members at meetings.

The group has been around since 2010 and had only four members last year, said Chase Alford, mathematics junior and president of the club. Memorable moments such as potluck gatherings and rides around campus, he said, define the social scene of the group and provide a community where he can pursue his love for unicycling while making strong friendships.



SHREYA RAVI | MERCURY STAFF

The Unicycle Club welcomes riders of any skill level as they work towards the estimable goal of juggling while riding.

"I think the Unicycle Club gives me a reason to be on campus and not be stuck in my room doing homework all the time," Alford said. "It's kind of cool being able to ride around campus and just be above everybody."

While unicycling can be a niche and difficult skill to pick up, computer science freshman Vincent Jones said the club teaches everything you need to know to succeed, with a relaxed atmosphere that

helps the learning journey. Practicing between the tennis courts, the club measures milestones in how far members can ride, going from one pole in the chain-link fence to the next; eventually, unicyclers work up to fully riding with no support. A normal club meeting involves new individuals learning to take that first step in unicycling and advanced individuals working on skills like turning, staying idle — balancing while the unicycle stands

still — and juggling while unicycling.

"Unicycling feels terrible when you're first learning, you're wobbling all over the place," Jones said. "But once you learn, and you're proficient, it just feels so smooth. Your hands are completely free, you're still moving forward ... it feels so graceful if you do it right."

Mechanical engineering junior Thea Youngblood said one of her favorite parts of the club is meeting people and the reactions she receives. Youngblood often wakes at 5 a.m. to take unicycle rides and finds the activity a good way to exercise, often running into passersby who are amazed at the skill. She said people often ask her to do tricks or ride the unicycle if they see her with one, allowing her to socialize with others easily.

"If I bring this [unicycle] out in public people will come up to me and ask," Youngblood said. "I'm definitely going to

SEE **UNICYCLE**, PAGE 11



AIR
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

characters have little depth because they are not given much screen time beyond corny one-liners. Especially infuriating, the Tuskegee Airmen — an Air Force Unit composed of African American men — are shown in only the final two episodes for a handful of minutes, with the writers lazily smushing in their personalities and motivations in the script without any care. The Tuskegee Airmen are effectively included as tokens, while the men's humanity and personalities are skimmed over and forgotten.

The physicality of the actors is great, with their movements as fluid and comfortable

as if they've been on their B-17 planes their entire lives. There is also a sense of physical familiarity among the men that cements their characters' relationships, especially for Austin Butler and Callum Turner, whose friendship is the heart of the series. Unfortunately, the actors were heavily underused in every other aspect, with Butler mainly serving as eye candy and Turner's character being nothing beyond a hot-headed meathead. Their friendship was endearing, but alone the two lacked the magnetism that the leading roles needed. Fans were also excited for Barry Keoghan's role in the series, but his cartoonish New Yorker accent tarnished almost every scene he was in.

The show had some redeeming factors

such as their cast of relatively unknown actors including Anthony Boyle, Nate Mann and Rafferty Law. These supporting men were scene stealers, acting less like Hollywood macho man cliches and more like real people with complex emotions and motivations. Their subtle charisma was more suited to the subject matter than Butler's and Turner's over-the-top performances. But even the cast's best additions were eventually left in the mud by writers with goofy dialogue and bland storylines as the creators attempted to juggle a handful of different plot lines.

Because of the overall mediocrity and lack of memorable dialogue, there was almost no emotional investment from viewers. It was difficult to gain any attachment to any

of the characters when each person's most dominant character trait was being an all-American military man with a barely tangible sprinkle of individuality. The creators of the series expect viewers to care about the characters just because they are patriotic, which results in a boring viewing experience.

With a star-studded cast and amazing filmmakers backing the project, it was unexpected that "Masters of the Air" would be so forgettable. Its mediocrity comes from a lack of focus and a lack of attention to its characters, resulting in glamorized shells of the real figures the show attempted to spotlight. The show is fascinating at times and beautiful to look at, but ultimately falls flat.

BATTLE OF THE BOTS

UTD's Comet Robotics spill oil on the battlefield as their robots crush their enemies on their path to victory

KAVYA RACHEETI
Mercury Staff

The UT Designscape where Comet Robotics meets looks like a scene out of Big Hero Six, with people tinkering away at robots of various shapes and sizes, allowing members to experience not just the excitement of combat but develop a deeper understanding of how robotics works.

Originally dedicated to combat robotics, the club's reinstatement in 2021 led to many changes to its structure, such as implementing a section of the club focused on competitive robotics and the introduction of plastic antweights, smaller robots that are easier to build and reassemble. Antweights are referred to as 'plants' and give members variety in their work. These plants are made through 3D printing and vary from one to three pounds, depending on the weight class the competition — a destructive one-versus-one between robots — calls for. Plants can also be used for other Comet Robotics projects, like chess bots, offering activities that appeal to a wide range of people.

"Everyone loves combat robotics — kids, older people, everyone," said Om Davra, computer engineering sophomore and vice president of the club.

This isn't to say that Comet Robotics only focuses on small-scale projects. Some of their competing robots, such as Desserts, weigh up to 15 pounds. But the crown jewel of Comet Robotics is Blender, the once-great combat robot that weighs a whopping 120 pounds. Blender has been out of commission since 2017 as the bot caught on fire after a competition, and there's no incentive to bring him back.

The longer time frame for construction and the lack of opportunities to test large-scale bots are what led to Comet Robotics focusing on smaller-scale robots, especially for competitions. The process for preparing a robot to compete is simple: testing your robot's design until you figure out what works, and then printing spares of your robot — made

easy with 3-D printing — to replace broken parts quickly. Easily replaceable parts further enhances the theatrics of combat robotics, and for mechanical engineering junior Jaime Contreras, allows for the real fun: watching robots get torn to pieces.

"The people are really friendly, so they want to see the robots get destroyed. So usually, when it happens, and you're the one who breaks it, they'll give the part to use as a trophy," Contreras said.

Anyone can get into building fighter robots, members said, so long as you have a passion for building and resources. For instance, the competitive robotics team offers a fast-paced environment for engineers that utilizes hard skills such as construction as well as softer skills, such as communication among team

members. This sense of community also extends online, as there are many places like Discord servers where aspiring builders can visit to find tutorials and advice on their builds. Anyone can participate, regardless of their age.

"Last semester, one of the competitions we went to, there was an 8-year-old fighting against an 80-year-old," Davra said.

The elaborate set-ups for these competitions, especially for larger events, keep up the fun-loving energy of combat robotics. When Comet Robotics went to South X Southwest (SXSW) on March 10 along with their robot Desserts, they had Battlebots announcer Faruq Tauheed Jenkins — prolific in the world of combat robotics — introduce Desserts with an opening they had written themselves. This competition is unprecedented in the reinstated club's history, as it was the first time Comet Robotics went to a Battlebots competition in over a decade.

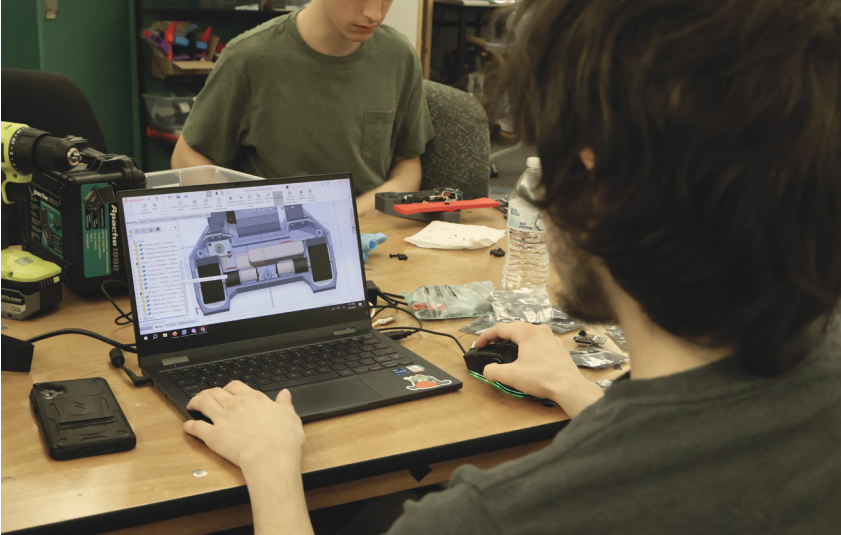
SXSW also led to Davra's favorite competition memory, when Desserts managed to flip their opponent, UC Berkeley's fifteen bot, up in the air, resulting in a victory on their debut battle.

"That was the first fight, the first time I drove Desserts in a fight," Davra said. "It was awesome."

“Everyone loves combat robotics – kids, older people, everyone.”
— Om Davra



SHREYA RAVI | MERCURY STAFF



SHREYA RAVI | MERCURY STAFF

Featured on the bottom right is Comet Robotics' heaviest robot: Blender beside two other robots.



APIARY CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

based communication and swarming behaviors.

Rippel's interest in studying bees stems from his childhood on his grandfather's farm. The lack of emphasis on courses about animal biology offered at UTD is piqued his interest in starting the Honey Bee Biology pilot course — a trial-run period for the class. For Rippel, working with beehives helps him escape and recuperate from long days.

"When you open up that hive, and there are thousands and thousands of these insects buzzing around, your mind becomes totally focused right there, you lose sight of all the other stresses that happen in life, and you end up focusing right there, into the present moment ... it calms you," Rippel said.



SHREYA RAVI | MERCURY STAFF



After seeing a swarm of honeybees outside his home and wanting to kill them to protect his granddaughter, Rippel became interested in their biology. After reading Thomas Seeley's Honeybee Democracy, the barrier between him and the fuzzy creatures melted away when his fascination overpowered his fear.

"I was naïve, there was no sense in killing them, I could have saved them. I learned about their biology ... and learned about their swarming behaviors and everything coalesced ... a year later [in 2013], I was teaching [this] class," Rippel said.

Currently, there are twenty beehives and almost half a million bees in total at Lot A and in the Eco Hub, which were built by students and installed in 2014. A thousand-dollar grant from Nature Nate, a honey company, supports the

other apiary on the south side of campus.

The apiary on Lot A itself is a small patch of land with multiple clusters of bee habitats called honey boxes. These boxes contain frames, a piece of plastic with octagonal shapes where bees roam and perform their daily tasks. When held up to the light, these framings expose the colorful nature of honey — reflecting many shades of blue, green and gold. Students in this class enjoy working with these boxes to uncover the way honeybees interact with one another.

For biology senior Nadia Painter, learning more about honeybees has helped her understand their importance, and she hopes to cultivate a hive of her own one day. Her interest in taking this class stems from helping cultivate gardens throughout her childhood and her mother's advice.

"Though she [Painter's mom] was deathly allergic to bee and wasp stings, she would always promote as long as you leave them alone, they will do their thing. I've never been afraid of bees ... they're adorable and they're helpful," Painter said.

Honey Bee Biology not only exposes students to the intricacies of colony life, it also provides an opportunity for students to taste different varieties of honey and explore each type's background. Tasting these honeys allows students to explore each honey's palette and dispels the notion that all honey tastes alike.

"Once they start tasting different honeys like manuka honey, lavender honey, tupelo honey, the floral tastes that they get, oh, I love the responses," Rippel said.

Much like Painter's desire to grow a hive, biology senior Brian Nguyen also hopes to pick up hobby beekeeping after being introduced through his mother's garden. One aspect of honeybees that stands out to Nguyen is their symbiotic nature and how they communicate as a super-organism; they all function to aid the continuation of the species.

"There's very little individuality and I think you can learn a lot from that ... they're willing to sacrifice themselves in a way, if necessary," Nguyen said.

Rippel hopes that by the end of the course, students understand the importance of the commercial honeybee in society. Because of the loss of habitat, pesticides, and climate change, Rippel said raising commercial honeybees is becoming increasingly important. In honor of Earth Week, six beehives will be installed the week of April 22.

BOOKS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

are translations. Of those books, 11 publishing imprints are from the Big Five publishers — Penguin Random House, Hatchett, Harper Collins, Simon and Schuster and Macmillan. The Big Five publishers are conglomerates of the book publishing industry, generating over \$12 billion in revenue and controlling about 80% of the industry. Most published translated books are still published by independent publishers, like Deep Vellum.

Shelby Vincent, associate director of the Translation Center at UTD, said publishers are sometimes hesitant to publishing translated works because they think Americans don't like to read translations — even though Americans are well-versed in the works of foreign writers, like Dostoyevsky, Proust, Kafka and more.

"All of the world's knowledge comes to us through translated works, whether it's philosophy or history or literature, the knowledge that's imparted is going to come through works in translation," Vincent said.

Deep Vellum has encouraged the growth of the literary community in Dallas since its start. Deep Vellum launched the Dallas Poet Laureate with the Dallas Public Library and the Office of Arts and Culture in April 2022, using public

readings, workshops, classes and events to cultivate a community appreciative of arts and literature. They also work with adult literacy programs in Dallas, helping to bridge the gap between publishers and readers.

"Being a nonprofit is not just about publishing books for [that] people already know, we're also bringing more readers into what we do," Evans said. "We need to have something for readers at every stage of their reading life and their reading journey."

To celebrate Deep Vellum's 10th year in retail, they will host a join party with The Wild Detectives bookstore, which opened its doors the same year as them. The bookstore's 10-year birthday celebration is a free three-day party weekend from April 19-21 that will include storytelling performances, DJ setlists, tattoo artists and merchandise available for purchase.

Evans said he is amazed at what he was able to accomplish by running a small indie bookstore. He says Deep Vellum is now becoming international as they expand their administrative offices to New York and possibly London.

"The most important thing is that this work is very fulfilling, and it means a lot and I know it makes a difference culturally and it's changed my life," Evans said.



SURJADITYA SARKAR | MERCURY STAFF

Comets finish last at President’s Cup

AAFIYA ASLAM
Mercury Staff

The UTD Chess team organized the President’s Cup on March 30 and 31 in the JSOM building through a bidding process with the US Chess Federation. However, despite the effort they put into hosting the tournament, the UTD Chess team placed last — a surprise and disappointment to the team.

Four universities participated in the tournament all winners at the Pan-Ams: Mizzou, Webster, UT Rio Grande Valley and UTD. The chess team was defeated in rounds 1 and 2 by Webster and Mizzou respectively and tied with UTRGV in round 3. The UTD players that competed in the tournament included David Brodsky, Koustav Chatterjee, Brian Escalante Ramirez and Karolis Juksta. Chess Coach Julio Sadorra said while he was disappointed at the result, the team will continue to put as much effort as possible into the next season; Sadorra said he believed the team performed better in training than what they showed at the tournament. Juksta believed that there was pressure coming from the other opponents which made them perform worse than expected.

“We came there expecting to play really well and we all knew we were better than this, but sometimes this happens,” Sadorra said.

UTD Chess continues to focus on improving as a team, recruiting international masters and grandmasters and working on strategy. Sadorra said that the Comets faced up against grandmasters that had more than 2650 in ELO rating for boards 1 and 2 for both Webster and Mizzou, which put them in a tough spot at the start. According to the results, the UTD chess team had Brodsky as board 1 — with an ELO rating of 2613 — and Chatterjee as board 2 — with an ELO rating of 2615. However, even with the loss, Sadorra said they are growing from their mistakes.

“I know it’s difficult, but [I’m] still proud of the effort,” Sadorra said. “The effort we use is going to be rewarded tenfold... We accept the losses, but it’s time to practice it, [to] learn from it.”

Juksta said that the team had a basic strategy based on their starting point. If the Comets played with the white pieces they would try and push, but if they



Above: A glimpse of the event. Bottom left: UTD’s Karolis Juksta (right) faces UTRGV’s Juraj Druska. Bottom middle: From left to right: UTD President Richard Benson, Brian Escalante Ramirez, Koustav Chatterjee, David Brodsky, Karolis Juksta and Coach Julio Sadorra. Bottom right: UTD’s Brodsky (left) faces UTRGV’s Victor Gazik (right).



RORY MOORE | MERCURY STAFF

had the black pieces they would stand their ground and try to make a draw or win — especially against higher rated players. In round 1, Juksta said he drew with Gergely Kantor from Webster, but Brodsky was in trouble playing against Webster’s board 1; in the end they lost that match. Juksta said after losing the first round, it would have been difficult to make a comeback.

“It was like a really big loss — three and a half to half — which is already impossible to make a comeback because in this tournament all the teams qualified during the Pan Ams. And now all of the teams’ one goal [is] to win [first place], and all the other placements didn’t really matter,” Juksta said.

In round 2, all the Comets lost due to unlucky positions against Miz-

zou, except Juksta, who drew against Luka Budisavljevi. At this point, the team was trying to fight for third place against UTRGV. In round 3, Brodsky won his game against Viktor Gazik from UTRGV, and Chatterjee and Juksta drew with Irakli Beradze and Juraj Druska respectively, making the match a draw overall.

“I drew again, but we had to win at least three, and the team match ended with two points,” Juksta said. “So they came in third and we got fourth,” Juksta said.

Juksta said that with each of his games, he played closed openings, which helped him defend his pieces. He tried to neutralize his opponents’ plans and take as little risk as possible so he could draw, since all of his opponents

were higher rated than him.

“So it came into the positional battle, which both me and my opponents managed pretty well and [as expected] all the games finished in draws,” Juksta said.

To plan the tournament, Jim Stallings — director of the UTD Chess program — offered a bid to the US Chess Federation to host the President’s Cup in JSOM. Eventually they won the bid, and Sadorra worked with Jeanette Henriques, program manager in Executive Education, to make sure everything was in place for the event.

“I find victory in the way we hosted this,” Sadorra said. “Probably the way we organized the event, [using] billboards, it’s advertised really well.”

Sadorra would like to thank UTD



IM Juksta v. GM Kantor, President's Cup, 2024

admin for coming out and supporting them in the tournament, as well as the reserve team and chess club members for helping set up.



BILAL RAHMAN | MERCURY STAFF

Comets rebound from loss, secure conference dominance

AARAV DEV
Mercury Staff

The UTD men’s tennis team took down Ozarks 6-3 on March 29 and Howard Payne 9-0 on April 4 before falling to SMU 6-1 on April 7. This brought the Comets’ four game win streak to an end, although they still hold first place in the ASC East.

Against Ozarks, the Comets opened the day by dropping the first two doubles games, before Noah Sam and Snehin Yerragudi won the third match 8-6. They bounced back by winning five of the six singles matches. All winners closed their matches in two sets. Snehin Yerragudi only dropped one game in total, and Benjamin Dubois lost just three.

“I think singles are a strong suit,” Sam said. “It was a good match, and we’re happy to have come out on top.”

Against Howard Payne, the Comets came

out blazing, winning all three doubles matches in just two sets and all by a margin of at least 6 games. They continued their dominance in the singles matches, with only one

“We knew it was gonna be a tough match. It shows where we have to step up in terms of just match play.”

”

— Noah Sam

HPU player winning more than one game.

“It was a booster of how it feels to know that you’re good,” Sam said. “I don’t think we ever faltered even for one second.”

The Comets’ momentum came to a halt with a tough 6-1 loss to SMU. The Division I team defeated UTD in all three doubles matches. The Comets lost in five of the six singles matches as well, with graduate student Jed De Luna providing the sole victory.

“We knew it was gonna be a tough match,” Sam said. “It shows where we have to step up in terms of just match play.”

After the conclusion of these matches a few Comets moved up the all-time leaderboards. De Luna is now third in career singles victories for UTD with 35. Senior Nick Boquet moved into a tie for eighth on the UTD

SEE **MEN’S**, PAGE 11

COMETS STILL FIRST IN ASC DESPITE ENDING STREAK

AARAV DEV
Mercury Staff

The UTD women’s tennis team crushed Ozarks 9-0 on March 29 before falling to Utah Tech 6-1 on April 2. They bounced back with a dominant performance against Howard Payne on April 4, winning 9-0 and remaining in first place in the ASC East.

Against Ozarks, the Comets easily won all three doubles matches to start the day’s play, only dropping one game out of 25 total. They also breezed through all six singles matches, only losing two games total. Riya Matharoo, Reika Nagai, Elyssa Ducret and Elsha Valluru all achieved flawless victories, winning every set they played.

“We’ve been doing pretty well in singles and doubles as well,” Matharoo said. “We’ve been going pretty strong as a team.”

The Comets’ momentum came to a stop with a tough 6-1 loss to Utah Tech. The Division I team defeated UTD in all three doubles matches. They lost in five of the six singles matches as well, with Ducret providing the sole victory

in a close three set match.

“They were just more consistent and we weren’t ready for that,” Matharoo said. “The conditions that day were really horrible, it was extremely windy.”

UTD rebounded from the loss with another impressive victory against HPU. They swept the doubles matches before winning all six singles, not needing more than two sets in any match. Matharoo and Nagai again had flawless performances. Matharoo said that the friendship and chemistry she has with her teammates has augmented their play.

“We have really good, I would say like I said, camaraderie, as we’re playing, we’re all constantly cheering each other on,” Matharoo said. “This team is really tight knit, and that does play a huge role in how we perform.”

After the conclusion of the matches, a few Comets moved up on UTD’s all-time leaderboards. Saumya Vedula improved to seventh in singles wins with 30. Ducret captured her 33rd doubles

SEE **WOMEN’S**, PAGE 11



BILAL RAHMAN | MERCURY STAFF

Comets honor late coach with on-field ceremony

TYLER BURKHARDT
Mercury Staff

Although assistant softball coach Abby Sterling passed away last November, her presence is still felt across the UTD softball team, who have dedicated the season to her memory.

On April 6, the Comets hosted an on-field ceremony with Sterling's family in attendance to commemorate the coach's dedication to supporting students and lasting influence within the program. UTD also announced the creation of a softball scholarship fund dedicated to Abby Sterling, which head coach Kelly Archer said will serve as a reminder of Sterling's impact on the program in perpetuity.

Before the game, third baseman Addison Caddell read a statement in Sterling's memory.

"She was a fierce competitor with a soft spot for us girls, who she loved as if we were her own," Caddell said. "This year, we are dedicating our season to her: every girl is wearing a green ribbon on her cleats to represent her memory ... we work every day to ensure that Coach Abby's light continues to touch every player in this program."

Maddie Sterling Vanderweg, Abby's sister, threw out the first pitch as part of the opening ceremonies. Immediately prior, the entire team — wearing shirts emblazoned with the slogan "Abby Strong" across the front — gathered at the pitcher's circle to present Sterling's brother and sister a memory book outlining the personal impact she had on each of the players.

"Abby meant a lot to all of us, and we wanted to do something to show that appreciation to her family," outfielder Riley Westmoreland said. "I think it helped a lot in the grieving process."

Westmoreland said the idea for the memory book came out of a conversation she had with her mother. Contributions came from current students, coaches and alumni of the team.



"I wanted to put together something that would show how special she was to us, and not just tell [her family]," Westmoreland said. "So, I asked all the girls to send me pictures they had with Abby, to write out their favorite memories or thoughts they wanted to share, and then we decorated it ... it was really personal."

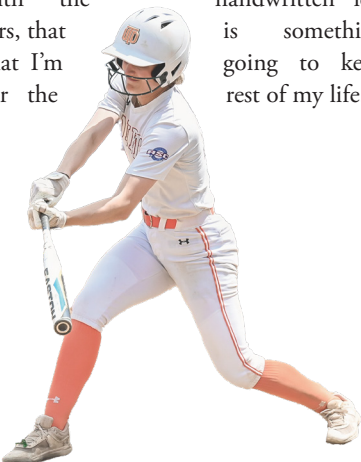
Archer said that the pre-game ceremony was also the first time that the Comets wore the Abby Strong shirts in public. The back of each shirt reads "it's a great day to have a great day," an adage favored by Sterling. Kyle Sterling Jr., Abby's brother, said that it meant a lot to see that the saying resonated with players.

"That was her quote," he said. "She would text it to me every morning, especially after our mom passed. Every time I heard it, it brought a smile to my face ... if you think about it, it makes sense, and it's powerful when you believe it."

Following the softball game, Maddie Sterling and Kyle Sterling Jr. both said they were moved by the student-planned

ceremony. After having most of the team in attendance at Abby's memorial service in November, this served as another reminder of the magnitude of Abby Sterling's impact.

"Abby lived and breathed softball," Maddie Sterling said. "She cared about every single person that was a part of this program like they were family, so this meant a lot ... we wouldn't have missed it for anything. And the photo album with the handwritten letters, that is something going to keep for the rest of my life."



CUTOUT BY AMOGHAVARSHA RAO | MERCURY STAFF

PHOTOS BY RORY MOORE | MERCURY STAFF

UTD SPORTS SCHEDULE

AWAYHOME

BASEBALL

APR 16 vs St. Thomas
3:00 PM

APR 19 at #5 East Texas Baptist
6:00 PM

APR 20 at #5 East Texas Baptist
12:00 PM & 3:00 PM

APR 23 vs vs Centenary (La.)
3:00 PM

APR 26 vs LeTourneau
2:00 PM

APR 27 vs LeTourneau
12:00 PM & 3:00 PM

SOFTBALL

APR 19 vs #4 East Texas Baptist
4:00 PM & 6:00 PM

APR 20 vs #4 East Texas Baptist
12:00 PM

APR 26 at LeTourneau
4:00 PM & 6:00 PM

APR 27 at LeTourneau
12:00 PM

W TENNIS

APR 19 at East Texas Baptist
2:00 PM

APR 21 at Tyler JC (Ex.)
2:00 PM

APR 25-27 ASC Tournament

M TENNIS

APR 18 at Tyler JC (Ex.)
2:00 PM

APR 20 at East Texas Baptist
3:00 PM

M GOLF

APR 19-21 ASC Championship

GRAPHICS BY KATHERYN HO | GRAPHICS EDITOR

MAY 14-17 NCAA DIII Championship

W GOLF

APR 15-16 Emory Spring Invitational

APR 28-30 ASC Championship

MAY 21-24 NCAA DIII Championship

TRACK&FIELD

APR 25-27 ASC Championship

WOMEN'S

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

victory, moving into seventh on the list. Megan Zeng also jumped on the doubles wins list, improving to ninth place. Kriti Parikh won her first duel match of the season.

The Comets will look to build on their impressive victories by continuing to play to their strengths. They travel to Abilene to take on Hardin-Simmons on April 12 before a home game against

CONCORDIA TEXAS
two days later.

"We're really excited," Matharoo said. "We want to compete and we believe good results will follow."

BILAL RAHMAN | MERCURY STAFF
GRAPHICS BY AMOGHAVARSHA RAO | MERCURY STAFF

MEN'S

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

doubles victory leaderboards with 24 wins. Dubois and Yerragudi built on their successful seasons and are now both 7-1 in singles this season.

Sam emphasized the chemistry and friendship that he and the rest of the team have with one another, and the positive effect it has on the team's performance.

"Our camaraderie is very close knit this year compared to all the past years that I've

been here," Sam said. "I feel like that's what kind of separates us from most teams in the ASC."

The Comets will travel to Abilene and look to bounce back against Hardin-Simmons on April 13, before returning home to face Concordia Texas the next day.

"We know what kind of skill we have, what kind of powerhouse we have and what kind of bond that we have as a team and I think that's what really scares our opponents this year," Sam said. "I think this is the year that we're going to win it all."

UNICYCLE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

stop to talk to that person and if I'm just riding through campus and if I see someone else on a unicycle, I'm definitely gonna stop and talk."

Biochemistry junior Justin Genco said the club is one of the best social groups in college he has experienced. Members often meet outside of practices to eat out and socialize. According to Genco, the unicycle club created lasting friendships even to the point where two of the members decided to move in together.

"I went to the first meeting, loved it, went to the second meeting and [that] was even better," Genco said. "It feels so different than any kind of thing that you'll do ... [and] everyone's having a good time, laughing and cracking jokes, getting

excited over doing some kind of trick." Computer science freshman Sean Clarke stumbled upon the unconventional hobby at the student organization fair. Initially dismissing the idea as 'silly,' Clarke's curiosity led him back to the club, where he decided to give it a try. Clarke found himself drawn to the club's tight-knit group, which he said helped him find his footing at UTD.

"I think it's been a nice break from academics, and just a way to just hang out, not worry about the daily stresses," Clarke said. "The focus is unicycling and just hanging out ... just chilling together, so it's just a breath of fresh air, a nice anchor to my week that I look forward to. Something that I take good things back from."

Despite fluctuations in attendance, Alford said recent efforts to promote activities, such as hanging flyers around school bulletins, have attracted

new people, with the group now having 15 members. With unicycling, Alford said he finds solace and fulfillment in pushing the boundaries of what he once thought was impossible, from juggling with his eyes closed to embarking on lengthy rides spanning up to 40 miles. He also said the group aspires to increase their rides around campus and planned events, like when members rode with the DFW Unicycle Club this past September near Grapevine Lake, to help better unify the group over their shared hobby.

"It's a great club and all the people there are super nice," Clarke said. "It's tricky and it takes time for sure ... [but] there's a lot of value in just trying things out and seeing where they go. [The learning process] felt a lot more personal and everyone's just trying to learn how to ride a unicycle together."

SHREYA RAVI | MERCURY STAFF

WOMEN'S

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

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"I went to the first meeting, loved it, went to the second meeting and [that] was even better," Genco said. "It feels so different than any kind of thing that you'll do ... [and] everyone's having a good time, laughing and cracking jokes, getting

excited over doing some kind of trick." Computer science freshman Sean Clarke stumbled upon the unconventional hobby at the student organization fair. Initially dismissing the idea as 'silly,' Clarke's curiosity led him back to the club, where he decided to give it a try. Clarke found himself drawn to the club's tight-knit group, which he said helped him find his footing at UTD.

"I think it's been a nice break from academics, and just a way to just hang out, not worry about the daily stresses," Clarke said. "The focus is unicycling and just hanging out ... just chilling together, so it's just a breath of fresh air, a nice anchor to my week that I look forward to. Something that I take good things back from."

Despite fluctuations in attendance, Alford said recent efforts to promote activities, such as hanging flyers around school bulletins, have attracted

new people, with the group now having 15 members. With unicycling, Alford said he finds solace and fulfillment in pushing the boundaries of what he once thought was impossible, from juggling with his eyes closed to embarking on lengthy rides spanning up to 40 miles. He also said the group aspires to increase their rides around campus and planned events, like when members rode with the DFW Unicycle Club this past September near Grapevine Lake, to help better unify the group over their shared hobby.

"It's a great club and all the people there are super nice," Clarke said. "It's tricky and it takes time for sure ... [but] there's a lot of value in just trying things out and seeing where they go. [The learning process] felt a lot more personal and everyone's just trying to learn how to ride a unicycle together."

Entitled students: No one owes you a degree

More than just a bad attitude, academic entitlement actively hurts all degree seekers and devalues diplomas by encouraging grade inflation

JACK SIERPUTOWSKI
Managing Editor

Imagine this: you're in a core class, past the withdrawal deadline, and suddenly a few choice classmates start to complain about the level of work required to pass. Exams are weighted too high, the projects are too long and we shouldn't have to take this class to graduate. Entitled students: why do you feel like you're owed a degree?

The truth is, higher education is supposed to be hard. If it wasn't rigorous, a four-year diploma would hold no weight. An undergraduate degree is supposed to be difficult, and for that reason, it's normal that some people may drop out. If you don't attain the necessary knowledge that a degree represents, then you shouldn't get an easy pass. Beyond a simple bad attitude, feeling entitled to a diploma idea does demonstrable harm to classroom conduct, our ability to learn, the value of our degrees and even our future job prospects. So next time you fail a course, don't automatically blame the professor, and don't expect success to be handed to you.

In college, if you can't hack it, no, you don't deserve to graduate. And you don't deserve to have achievements handed to you. The main point of a diploma is to prepare you for the future: to verify that you have the skills and knowledge to do your job or go into higher level studies. It's no wonder that, according to a survey by the American Association of Colleges and Universities, eight in 10 employers believe that a college degree is important, as an education prepares graduates to succeed in the workplace. Your degree requirements aren't cobbled together randomly — their core knowledge is standardized across universities to ensure that your employer can reliably tell what knowledge you are bringing to the job. Because of this, if you fail a degree-specific course, it definitionally means that you don't have the skills a degree says you do. If a mechanical engineering major failed calculus, the



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dean wouldn't just waive the requirement; they would have to retake calculus until they passed. Passing you along for no reason makes no sense and stops making degrees a good measure of skills when it comes to employment.

Ultimately, none of us automatically deserve an A. The combined forces of grade inflation — the increased average grade given to students — and the American culture of entitlement have coddled us into thinking that way. According to Erudera, in universities in France it is rare for a student to earn above a 16/20 — the equivalent of 80%. And the burden of attaining an A used to be a feature of our education system, too. It used to be that grades were distributed on a bell curve: the majority of students would receive a C, those who

put in more effort received a B, and those who truly went above and beyond would receive an A. But now, after years of grade inflation as documented by the ACT's research report, a high score is almost seen as standard. In 2022, more than half of American high schoolers received an A across four different subjects, English, math, social studies and science. And the dumbing down of grading has real world consequences on the quality of education: studies from both Brown University and the Thomas Fordham Institute have found that students learn more and perform better in the future when they have teachers who grade more strictly.

And this grade inflation has real consequences on the worth of a degree in the job market. A survey from

the National Association of Colleges and Employers found that throughout the 2000s, the proportion of employers that screened applicants by GPA generally hovered between 70% and 80%. In a follow-up survey in 2023, this proportion had plummeted to only 37%. And it's hard to argue with this decline, given diplomas no longer signify the level of knowledge they used to. The ACTA's "What Will They Learn" survey, which looks at academic requirements at American universities, found that less than 30% of public and private colleges require that students take courses in the basic fields needed to have a well-rounded education, including U.S. Government or History, Economics and Literature. As the requirements for getting a degree become

laxer, its relative worth shrinks and shrinks, watered down by meaningless and empty high marks. And when you demand that professors give you an easy A, you contribute to the continued decline of educational standards.

You might argue that having hard grading standards in college is just a money grab. After all, UTD has the highest tuition of any public school in Texas, and if you get held back, then they get an extra year of money. With all that money spent, it's not fair if you don't graduate, right? Unfortunately, this attitude is fundamentally harmful to your education. A study from 2022 found that more academically entitled students view their time in a college as a transaction and as a result are less engaged in learning and have poorer social adjustment. And more importantly, viewing UTD as a grifter is unfair given our school goes to great lengths to help people find alternate options and work through obstacles to graduate. Whether that be alternate core classes offered in the summer so students can graduate on time, or the advocacy of the Graduation Help Desk sorting out senior year struggles, admin goes to great lengths to make sure people graduate on time. If you are struggling, the Help Desk can make things easier, but that doesn't mean they'll do all the work for you.

At the end of the day, complaints are hard to stomach because, ultimately, no one is forcing you to go to college. You currently have access to higher education, an opportunity that around half of Americans will never enjoy, according to Lumina's Stronger Nation report, and it is an immense privilege. And yes, at times it can be difficult. But so is life. And in the future, no one is ever going to hand you things just because you think you deserve them. You will have to put in work, and you will have to ask for support if you need it. College is the perfect place to learn that lesson.



GRACE COWGER | MERCURY STAFF

‘Heartstopper’ makes minorities tokens

KAVYA RACHEETI
Mercury Staff

To justify queerness to heterosexual audiences, queer media loses its nuance and limits exploration of other topics besides sexuality. This stems from new queer media treating queerness as a political concept rather than what it actually is: human expression.

On March 20, Netflix announced several new titles coming to the platform in 2024, including a renewal of Alice Oseman's "Heartstopper," which will receive its third season this October. This news hardly comes as a shock, as the previous season of the show received 6.1 million watchers on release, along with fellow queer Netflix original "Young Royals" garnering 11 million views in one week in its third and final season. This phenomenon of cheesy queer media gaining momentum in the public eye is nothing new: Greg Berlanti's 2018 film "Love, Simon" is Twentieth Century Fox's third highest-grossing teen film. While these titles all carefully and lovingly tackle themes like homophobia and coming out, cementing themselves as titles that queer youth deserve to grow up with,

their affirmative and warm nature dampens the quality of the shows themselves by sacrificing nuance.

Queer media that goes beyond simple representation often stands the test of time. When you think of a queer movie, chances are you think of titles such as Ang Lee's "Brokeback Mountain" or James Ivory's "Maurice." The relationship dynamics of these films are not ones that should be the standard of a queer relationship; in both films, one man pathetically vies for the affection of the other, who is incredibly repressed because of the suffocating nature of a heteronormative society. While these films aren't encouraging you to model your relationships after them, they add an emotional complexity to the love story genre. "Brokeback Mountain" goes beyond treating queerness as a monolith, considering the leads are two very masculine men. "Maurice," similarly, has a very multifaceted outlook on love and, in contrast to other queer films of its time, has a happy ending — especially important given it released during the AIDS

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Flooding in UV: UTD needs to do better

Possible fixes include updated landscaping and more space to absorb water

REES BLATT
Mercury Staff

Any resident of UV knows that after a rainstorm, it's best to take the long way around and avoid the sidewalks. Whenever there is even a small amount of rainfall, housing areas become impassable quagmires full of water and mud — but does it have to be that way?

University Village's foundational issues with the layout of student apartments leads to chronic flooding in key walkways, a continuous inconvenience to students trying to get to and from class. It's become typical for there to be inches of wet mud and pools of water occupying much of the sidewalk, especially in older phases like 2 and 3. These obstructions often take days for the administration to fix, requiring maintenance workers to clear out the buildup of muck across UV after every single storm, which until then blocks students' paths and makes it difficult for people with accessibility needs to navigate campus. UTD desperately needs to invest in either better stormwater management or a landscape that is less conducive to flooding.

UV's drainage problems stem from its age, as the oldest phases were built in 1989. These 35-year-old apartments have not aged well, as we've seen a degradation of walkways with steep hills and recesses resulting in systemic issues with flooding. Some walkways have

wooden platforms installed into the sidewalk in an attempt to counteract the movement of mud and water, but the small channels they provide to help drainage have not been very effective.

As UTD's campus rapidly expands with new buildings like the new Student Union and the Athenaeum, this increased construction must be accompanied by an expansion in the infrastructure that manages stormwater. UT Austin Assistant Professor of Community and Regional Planning Katherine Lieberknecht said cities and areas which experience rapid growth regularly struggle with stormwater infrastructure. This issue is particularly bad in UV because of its age. While UV apartments were expanded from 1989 to 2005, it is likely that the stormwater systems were not satisfactorily expanded to match the new construction and runoff from concrete, which could lead to increased pooling in older phases of UV. This problem will only get worse as climate change intensifies earth's water cycle, leading to heavier rain.

"There are definitely things that UT Dallas can think about doing, and some of them are pretty low intervention," Lieberknecht said. "Just making space for that rainwater to infiltrate into the ground more quickly ... you can do that in ways that actually have

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Walkways in UV regularly flood after rainstorms, due to poor drainage.

TikTok ban is good, actually

PAOLA MARTINEZ
Mercury Staff

The House of Representatives passed a bill on March 13 threatening to ban TikTok for cyber security breaches. Although this ban was done for security reasons, it will also help to control short form video content that has spread doom scrolling and caused attention spans to shorten. Students should advocate for local governments to regulate short form video content so we can protect ourselves from the negative effects of these platforms.

Endlessly swiping up to the next video is the feature that skyrocketed TikTok to

its popularity, part of what makes the app engaging. TikTok's version of the endless scroll led to such widespread addiction that this feature is now referred to as "doom scrolling." Users, usually teenagers and young adults, cannot control themselves when using the app and continue swiping for hours on end, watching videos algorithmically tailored to them. Other social media apps have taken note of the engagement doom scrolling brings to their app; even when you try escaping the addictiveness of TikTok, it follows you around in Instagram reels and YouTube shorts. Many of these reels and

shorts are re-uploads of existing TikToks, meaning users see these videos more than once, eliciting a feeling of never-ending escape.

Short form video content is concise and brief, often under a few minutes or a couple of hundred words. On TikTok, this content manifests as videos generally no longer than three minutes, which rapidly capture a viewer's attention before they are sent to the next video. The shortness of this content has led to many social media users having decreased attention

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COMETS V. TACO BELL: A CASE FOR #6

If Taco Bell has any respect for students' palates, it must bring back combo #6 so we can enjoy cheap chicken quesadillas

CHRISTOPHER EVERETT
Courtesy

Taco Bell's menu is full of broken promises, and I've been fooled into giving it another chance time after time.

After waiting an excessive amount of time, you'll receive your mediocre meal, take a bite, and wonder if you could've eaten anything else. Before attending UTD, I had stopped eating there altogether. However, thanks to UTD's Meal Exchange program, if you already spent thousands on a meal plan at the beginning of the semester, there are a variety of spots on campus you can get a free meal from. For reasons unknown to those who enjoy good tasting food, one of those spots is Taco Bell. And just a month ago, it's gotten worse: the loss of the quesadilla as a meal exchange is an assault on our stomachs, and Comets should protest to get it returned.

Combo #6 — now known as combo #7 — was one of the best Taco Bell meal exchange items. It consisted of a chicken quesadilla, one crunchy taco and a beverage. It is difficult to ruin a quesadilla — despite Taco Bell's best efforts — so on a late night, I'd endure the quesadilla, the awful crunchy taco, and the flat Sprite. At least the quesadilla was good.

That was the past. As of late March 2024, if you're hungry in a night class and desperately need something to eat afterward, combo #6 is no longer an option. If you don't want to spend any of your meal money at Taco Bell, you have to eat an entirely new selection of food. Unfortunately, this new selection does not include the chicken quesadilla. The entire company recently shuffled around and removed items from its universal menu, but the chicken quesadilla hasn't disappeared — it has simply moved down a number. Considering it still exists, I'm baffled by the decision to remove it as an option for the meal exchange.

Why not eat the remaining options? Let's start with the three crunchy tacos. The shell doesn't taste good, and the beef is so incredibly greasy that it erodes the bottom of the taco. You're soon left with a limp-lettuce, greasy, cheesy, two-halved



ERIN GUTSCHKE | MERCURY STAFF

mess that leaves you wanting to go to culinary school just to prove that you could have made this better. The soft taco is slightly better, but that doesn't fix the problem of the mediocre ingredients used to create it. The quesadilla uses at most three ingredients, which is difficult to mess up. Sometimes they forget to cut it up into four neat pieces, but you can work with that. You can't put the crunchy taco back together. You can't make the meat less greasy. You can't make the lettuce less

limp. I intend on living fairly long, so I'd like to avoid the goop that comprises their burritos.

This is a persistent issue I have encountered at all Taco Bells, not just UTD's Taco Bell. However, unlike other locations, UTD's meal plan provides an incentive for first year students to try and rekindle their relationship with Taco Bell. The chicken quesadilla was far from perfect, but it was the best they had to offer, and it came cheap with a meal exchange.

I was fooled again. It became the most convenient option, and so I — probably like many other Comets — folded on my principles. But Taco Bell blatantly taking away their best menu item as a meal exchange option is disrespectful. It would be disrespectful to your own intelligence to continue eating there regardless of its convenience.

Taco Bell should be replaced with any other fast-food establishment that doesn't disrespect the entire Hispanic culture's

food as much. Luckily, it seems like UTD is willing to listen to us Comets. The dining website for UTD has a feedback section that you can send in your grievances about Taco Bell to. They also have a feedback email address, at foodservice@utdallas.edu where students can demand that combo #6 in return in its original form with the chicken quesadilla. If we Comets want any shot at getting back the best meal exchange option, then we must stand up and make our voices heard.



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other benefits too.”

An effective way to mitigate flooding would be to simply provide more space for rainwater to soak into the ground, to speed up drainage. This could be done by digging up concrete fixtures and adding in more greenspace or a garden. A prime candidate for this would be the pools around UV: these fantastic wastes of money see little to no student use and generally obstruct walking paths around the apartment struc-

tures. Certainly they were originally made with good intentions, but seeing as they rarely see any activity, they would be prime candidates for removal.

While removing the pools could help with water pooling, it would also impair student movement for a time, as large areas in almost every phase would need to be closed off for construction. As a lower impact fix, the university could make minor landscaping changes to the terrain around UV, like evening out parts of walkways with steep hills.

Ultimately, it would seem that UTD is not very invested in improving its aging apartments as it struggles to just meet demand for housing, with a waitlist that gets longer year by year. Shy of knocking down structures and completely redoing the land UV is built on, the only feasible way to fix this issue would be to significantly change its landscaping. Unfortunately, extensive changes to landscaping would be costly, meaning admin will not want to implement them on their own. If we want to improve flooding on campus, we will have to do

it ourselves.

In the past, advocacy for change around campus has been successfully pushed in student council meetings. SG's Residential Student Affairs Committee is responsible for making “living on campus the best that it can be,” according to their website, and is a prime target for concerns about the infrastructure of housing. So if you are tired of wading through a puddle of mud after every little rainstorm, please, join me in emailing your concerns to the current committee chair, Anish Padala.

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crisis. What these films offer is an affirmation that love is not easy in a complicated but realistic way.

Insisting on palatability both reduces nuance in queer media and limits the themes that fiction can explore. Since “Brokeback Mountain” isn't explicitly focused on being an emblem of diversity or a “gay story,” it manages to have actual dimensionality when talking about masculinity and sexual orientation. On the other

hand, while on paper “Heartstopper” has a diverse range of characters, they fail to lack any true depth outside of being tokens. This includes a Black transgender woman, Elle Argent (Yasmin Finney), as well as other people of color like her love interest Tao Xu (Will Gao) and one of her closest friends, Tara Jones (Corrina Brown).

The majority of the first season of “Heartstopper” was filmed in Kent — presumably a model for the show's setting — which, as of 2021, has an 88% white popula-

tion. This sentiment is reflected in the show, as the main characters, Nick Nelson (Kit Connor) and Charlie Spring (Joe Locke) are white, as well as most of the minor characters.

Despite the homogeneity of the cast and setting, the show doesn't have the courage or emotional depth to approach the actual struggles faced by people of color in such an environment. There is not a single conversation on the loneliness that people of color face in predominantly white communities, nor are there

any major cultural signifiers in the show aside from Elle and Tara's ethnic hairstyles. Because “Heartstopper” fancies itself as a champion of queer joy and little else, its rallying cry for diversity and universal acceptance pales when its nonwhite characters are not allowed to be emotionally complex.

That isn't to say that “Heartstopper” is unnecessary; it very much is. It shows a healthy queer relationship and a positive depiction of coming out, something all young queer people can benefit

from seeing. But “Heartstopper,” despite its popularity, isn't the quintessential title for queer joy. In fact, it's hardly the first title to have this premise. Take Thomas Bezucha's “Big Eden,” which centers around an out gay man in a tumultuous relationship with an incredibly closeted person who has been in his life for a while, only to be swept off his feet by another man who may not completely understand his sexuality but isn't afraid of it. Queer joy isn't a male-centric concept either. For instance, there's Jamie

Babbit's cult classic “But I'm a Cheerleader,” which also deals with heavy subject matter like conversion therapy, but ultimately has a good ending without giving up a thoughtful narrative.

While “Heartstopper” and “Young Royals” are important pieces of fiction, don't let them overshadow queer media as a whole. Comets who are unsatisfied with newer queer work should look to the classics for nuance on the complexity of love.



RAINIER PEDERSON | MERCURY STAFF

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spans. We have gotten so used to instant gratification and entertainment that watching a standard movie of one hour and 30 minutes is too much. This is especially mentally damaging since a shortened attention span affects our ability to learn and retain information, leaving us to rely heavily on an unreliable and exhaustible short term memory.

Some may argue that a ban of the app would unfairly affect influencers, who depend on their TikTok following for money. Thanks to the nature of TikTok's algorithm, anyone with enough luck can go viral and become a popular creator with a fanbase. Although regulation of short form video content will remove a form of content for these influ-

encers, they could still use other forms social media to influence. Word posts, stories, pictures and even longer video formats would still exist, and creators have found just as much successful with these different media types.

Banning TikTok will not get rid of all short form video content; we need government regulation because self-control does not work. Even if a user does remove the TikTok app, it doesn't mean that short form video content won't follow them around to other social media platforms. By having government regulation like the TikTok ban, social media platforms will become more conscious of the type of video content they allow on their app or site.

Searching on YouTube “how to get rid of shorts” will yield several videos giving viewers a

step-by-step guide on removing YouTube's version of TikToks. There is clearly a demand from the public to remove the short form video content rotting our brains. We can advocate for regulation surrounding short form video content by bringing this to the attention of our local legislators, which can reach up to the branches of our federal government.

In the meantime, we have the ability to contact these apps through the apps themselves and report the negative effects caused by the short form content these social media platforms keep pushing on its users. We can also delete social media apps, like TikTok or Instagram. If apps are noticing a decrease in users, they will be more likely to change their approaches to content for the better.



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